LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

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Rabbi Heschel Greenberg
212 Exeter Road
Williamsville, NY 14221
716-632-0467
716-245-9520
rabbigreenberg@yahoo.com

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Vayishlach* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 23 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

Parshas Vayishlach alludes to the ultimate rapprochement between Jacob and Esau which our Prophets predicte will take place in the Messianic Age.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

B"H

ESSAY ONE

THE WRESTLERS

We have instruments that G-d put at our disposal, such as the internet, fax machines, computers etc.

Some view these technological marvels as the "angel of Esau" that must be fought because of their negative influence.

It makes more sense to view the tools of modern technology as positive instruments that were invented to challenge us.

By utilizing this technology to transmit more of Torah and positive messages to a greater number of people — i.e., showing G-d's mastery over technology and not the reverse — we achieve a great victory for G-d and the Jewish people — which is the definition of the word Israel.

ESSAY ONE

THE WRESTLERS

Struggling with Esau's Guardian Angel

Jacob was returning home from his 22 year sojourn with his uncle Laban, where he established a family and amassed a huge fortune. Now he was about to confront his brother Esau from whom he had "appropriated" his father's blessings.

Before Jacob reaches his brother Esau, the Torah records how Jacob had sent all his family forwards and he was left alone. At that point, a "man" wrestled with Jacob all night long until Jacob prevailed..

Our Sages tell us that this was no ordinary man with whom Jacob wrestled. Rather this was Esau's guardian angel. This confrontation portended the struggle Jacob's progeny, the Jewish nation, will be destined to experience at the hands of those who were endowed with Esau's spirit.

By prefacing that this struggle occurred when Jacob remained alone, we can derive the obvious lesson that threats to Jewish survival and well-being can only come

when we fail to be united; when we stand alone.

But, there are additional lessons to be derived from the way the Torah characterizes their struggle. The Torah describes their encounter by using a word *"Va'yei'avku"* that can be translated two ways. This word that is usually translated as "and they wrestled" actually has two meanings, representing two distinct characteristics of a wrestling match:

It can be rendered, "And they embraced," or "and they caused the dust to rise." When people wrestle, they do hold each other in an embrace and they also stir up the dust they are fighting on that rises high into the air.

The paradigm for the Future

Based on the notion that the confrontation Jacob had with the angel is a paradigm for all future struggles the Jewish people will have with their enemies, we must attempt to understand what are the two characteristics of wrestling "embracing" and "kicking up the dust" all about in terms of our own personal struggles with our physical and spiritual adversaries?

On one level, the *Chatam Sofer (*one of the greatest 18th century *Halachic* authorities and Jewish leaders) explains that there are two methods that the nations of the world

traditionally attempted to turn us away from our religion. Either they threw dust in our faces, figuratively speaking, by constantly persecuting, deriding and humbling us like the dust of the earth. And –when they realize that persecution and ridicule do not work, they try to take us into their embrace and entice us to assimilate into their culture and abandon the Jewish traditions.

From this perspective, however, the struggle with the angel of Esau is viewed as a negative experience. One must learn how to avoid this battle and not be attacked or lured by our adversary.

No Engage but do not Embrace

One can also understand the entire struggle with this angel in a positive manner. Rather than viewing it as a battle against our enemy, we can look at it as guide how to engage our adversary, thereby meeting the challenge that is the very purpose of our existence.

G-d put us here precisely because He wanted us to deal with Esau and that which he represents.. Life is not just about self-defense and avoidance of being influenced by evil, it is about engagement with the "outside" world and changing it, as it was in the narrative of Jacob's wrestling match. The angel finally declared that Jacob was the master (the translation of the name Israel) and not a follower (the

translation of the name Jacob-Heel). When even Esau's forces recognize the beauty of Jewish values; that is a confrontation that is purposeful and desirable.

However, while we are engaged in this "effort" and meeting the challenge to affect even the angel of Esau, we must not lower our standards, just to be able to relate to the Esau's of the world. We must not allow Esau's angel to "embrace" us with his way of thinking; on the contrary we must be the ones to influence him. And secondly, we must not allow Esau to "kick up the dust" so that we no longer have the same appreciation for our own ways, because it is covered with dust.

Instruments of Modernity: Double Edged Swords

One application for our times is clear. We have instruments that G-d put at our disposal, such as the internet, fax machines, computers etc. Some view these technological marvels as the "angel of Esau" that must be fought because of their negative influence. However, in light of the above, it makes more sense to view the tools of modern technology as positive instruments that were invented to challenge us. By utilizing this technology to transmit more of Torah and positive messages to a greater number of people — i.e., showing G-d's mastery over technology and not the reverse — we achieve a great

victory for G-d and the Jewish people — which is the definition of the word Israel.

The fact that these technologies were not around before, tells us that they were revealed now as a preparation for such time that the entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d. Even Esau will be refined and recognize the oneness of G-d and His sovereignty. We do, though, have to take the necessary precautions that these "Messianic tools" do not throw dust in our eyes, embrace and master us. Instead, they will aid us in the dissemination of goodness and holiness throughout the world.

ESSAY TWO

NAME DROPPING

The preference Jacob had for the name Benjamin-Son of the South (Israel) over Rachel's' choice, *Ben Oni*-the Son of My Pain, for their last son, reflects the way Jacob viewed life in general.

Never forgetful of the travail that he lived through, he was committed to the "Land of Israel" mentality of optimism, joy and growth.

ESSAY TWO

NAME DROPPING

"Son of the South"

Benjamin was the twelfth and last of Jacob's sons to be born. This week's Parsha recounts the tragic circumstances surrounding his birth:

> "...Rachel gave birth and had difficulty in her childbirth. ...As her soul was departing — for she died — that she called his name *Ben Oni [the son of my pain]*, but his father called him Benjamin."

What is the meaning of the name Benjamin? Rashi explains that it translates as "the son of the south," a reference to the Land of Canaan, Israel which was south of *Aram,* from where Jacob traveled. By naming his son "Son of the south" Jacob meant to acknowledge that he alone of all his children was born in the land of Israel.

Even a cursory analysis of this incident begs a question. Why did Jacob not keep the name that his beloved wife Rachel gave her son on her deathbed? Why did he prefer the name Benjamin (Son of the South, i.e. Israel) over *Ben*

Oni (Son of My Pain)?

In truth, this is not the first time Jacob changed a name given by someone else. In last week's Parsha Jacob and his shifty uncle Laban finally made a pact between themselves. Jacob then had a monument of stones built to serve as testimony to their new relationship. The Torah then relates that Laban first named this monument "*Yagar Sahaduta*," Aramaic for "the Mound is a witness," whereas Jacob then named it "*Gal'ed*" which is Hebrew for the same thing.

Difference between Hebrew and Aramaic

By understanding why Jacob insisted on referring to the monument by its Hebrew name rather than by its Aramaic name given by Laban, we will also have the key to answering the question about his naming of Benjamin.

The difference between Hebrew and Aramaic is clarified in the Jerusalem Talmud: Hebrew is the language suited for Torah, whereas Aramaic is the language that is suited for the expression of grief.

It is interesting to note, parenthetically, that some commentators suggest that this might be the reason why the Kadish prayer — recited by mourners— has been composed in Aramaic.

The Holy Tongue is the language that expresses G-dly

wisdom. And anything associated with G-d is by definition associated with joy and optimism.

Transforming Conflict into Medium for Growth

When Jacob built the monument that would create a separation between himself and Laban, Laban, in his typical negative and suspicious manner, viewed it as a precaution against Jacob's possible trespassing into his turf. Laban was preoccupied with the danger Jacob posed to him that could be avoided by way of this monument. Jacob, by contrast, had a more sanguine view of this monument. To Jacob it symbolized the ability to transform a conflict into a medium for growth.

Similarly, the preference Jacob had for the name Benjamin- Son of the South (Israel) over Rachel's' choice, *Ben Oni*-the Son of My Pain, for their last son, reflects the way Jacob viewed life in general. Never forgetful of the travail that he lived through, he was committed to the "Land of Israel" mentality of optimism, joy and growth.

19th of Kislev

This Shabbos, which occurs on the nineteenth of Kislev, is the Chassidic Holiday known as *Yud-Tes-Kislev.* It is the anniversary of the liberation from Czarist imprisonment of

the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement, R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi. This day has been celebrated by Chassidim for over two centuries as the holiday of victory for the ideals and teachings of Chassidism, among which one finds the idea of joy and optimism that is borne out of a firm belief in G-d and His closeness to us.

Even when we see conditions of exile and barriers that give the appearance of negativity and grief, the person imbued with Chassidic vision and vitality, views it in a positive, upbeat, Israel and Moshiach oriented manner.

Indeed, it is interesting to note, the word Benjamin also connotes the "Son of the [end of] Days," a Biblical reference to the end of exile and the beginning of the imminent Redemption. With the positive and joyous attitude of Chassidus, we will hasten the Redemption, at which time there will be true peace and joy in Israel and for the entire world.

ESSAY THREE

WHOLLY, WHOLLY, WHOLLY

One might have reached the erroneous conclusion that there is some good in suffering because of the heroic responses that it elicits.

The Torah, by telling us that Jacob returned whole in terms of his body, wishes to impress upon us that suffering is not a permanent fixture in G-d's plan for the world.

To be sure, suffering has elicited our deepest soul powers of self-sacrifice.

Suffering has given us an opportunity to actualize hidden spiritual potential.

Nevertheless, it is a state of existence that will come to an end and will ultimately be transcended.

ESSAY THREE

WHOLLY, WHOLLY WHOLLY

Three-fold Connotation of Whole

When the Patriarch Jacob returns to the Land of Israel, after many years of travail, he settles in the city of Shechem. The Torah, in this week's Parsha, describes his arrival in Shechem as follows: "and Jacob arrived in Shechem **whole**."

What is the implication of the word "whole?"

Our sages explain that it has a three-fold connotation. Firstly, Jacob, despite the injury that he had suffered when he had a wrestling match with Esau's angel, was now cured. He was no longer limping as he had previously. Hence he was whole in terms of his bodily functions.

Secondly, our Sages continue, Jacob was financially whole. Despite the extravagant gift he had given his brother Esau, he was still fiscally sound and "whole."

Thirdly, Jacob did not suffer spiritually. All his Torah knowledge that he had acquired in his youth prior to his

departure from Israel, was not lost as a result of his many years that he spent working for his uncle Lavan.

Omen for the Future

Everything the Torah tells us about our Patriarchs, our sages tell us, has a direct bearing on the lives of the Jewish people.

Jacob's ordeals in *Charan* where his scheming uncle Lavan lived, is a portent of the wanderings and travails of the Jewish nation in their exile from their homeland.

Accordingly, Jacob's return to his homeland and his settling in the city of Shechem in a state of "wholeness" is an omen for the Jewish people as well. After all that the Jewish nation has been through, they will finally experience peace and tranquility and will remain whole in all of three aforementioned areas.

An End to Suffering

Firstly, we will remain whole physically. Although the Jewish people responded to their physical persecution heroically and with great self-sacrifice, G-d will ultimately bring an end to suffering. One might have reached the erroneous conclusion that there is some good in suffering because of the heroic responses that it elicits. The Torah,

by telling us that Jacob returned whole in terms of his body, wishes to impress upon us that suffering is not a permanent fixture in G-d's plan for the world.

To be sure, suffering has elicited our deepest soul powers of self-sacrifice. Suffering has given us an opportunity to actualize hidden spiritual potential. Nevertheless, it is a state of existence that will come to an end and will ultimately be transcended.

Material Matters Intact

Secondly, our experience in exile necessitates involvement in worldly affairs that is analogous to Jacob's lavish gift he had sent to Esau. But, alas, Jacob's gift was no longer in the possession of a man as spiritual as Jacob. It would have appeared as if Jacob's material resources were compromised and tainted.

Likewise, life in exile necessitates that our resources — time, effort and money — are expended on "Esau-like" worldly pursuits, rather than on the "Jacob" oriented spiritual ones. It appears that our resources are lost to the world of the spirit, or at the very least compromised.

True, the reason for this involvement is to tame the world, refine it and bring it closer to G-d. Nevertheless, one might have thought that in the final tally, we will remain deficient

and the integrity of our existence will have been compromised.

By telling us that Jacob returned whole in the material sense as well, our sages suggest that the end result of our exile involvement with material matters will be to elevate the material to the point where they too become G-dly and in the final analysis nothing will be lost.

Torah Knowledge Intact

And finally:

Just as Jacob did not forget his Torah knowledge, so too, all of the spiritual qualities that we acquired before we were exposed to the influences of exile cannot be lost.

The reason for this is that even if outwardly we seem to have lost some of our spiritual content and Torah knowledge, they remain embedded in the inner core of our souls. By way of analogy, in this computer age, we know of many instances where information may have been deleted from our files. But, with the right software, we can still access all the information by probing into some hidden parts of our hard drive.

The message from Jacob's return is an uplifting one. No matter how much we think we lost in all of our painful history, everything will be restored to us in the end. We

should, therefore, never feel that our efforts are in vain. On the contrary, every positive act brings us one step closer to the realization of our greatest hope and dream — a time of "returning whole" in the final redemption ushered in by Moshiach.

ESSAY FOUR

HUMILITY

When a person is exposed to something so much greater than himself, it engenders a natural sense of insignificance and humility.

When a relatively tall person stands next to a much taller person, he will somehow feel short.

And the more good we experience then, the more humble we become, and the more humble we become the less we feel that G-d still owes us anything.

ESSAY FOUR

HUMILITY

Diminished!

Jacob was returning to his homeland, nervously anticipating a hostile reaction from his brother Esau, who had expressed the desire to kill him years earlier when he "stole" his blessings from him.

Jacob speaks of his fear that Esau will harm him and prays to G-d for assistance. To explain why he was so apprehensive, Jacob offers the following statement: "I have become diminished from all of the kindnesses..."

Several questions come to mind. First, what did Jacob mean when he said that he had become diminished? In what way was he smaller?

Second, why would G-d's kindness diminish him?

Third, why was Jacob so fearful of his brother Esau? Hadn't G-d already promised him that He would be with him and guard him wherever he would go? Did Jacob, harbor

doubts about G-d's promise? Obviously not. Otherwise why would he feel more secure now if G-d would simply reiterate His original promise?

Too Many Claims

Rashi addresses all these questions by saying that Jacob felt that he had exhausted all of the merits he had accumulated in the past. G-d had already protected Jacob throughout his entire stay with Laban. Whatever righteousness he possessed—that earned him G-d's blessings for protection in the past—he might have depleted. Moreover, Jacob was concerned that he might have regressed and was therefore no longer worthy of the original promise of protection.

Accordingly, the meaning of the phrase "Il have become diminished" is that his merits may have become diminished and depleted as a result of all the "claims" he has already made, banking on the "premiums" that he paid into the system. The word "diminished" thus refers to his merits, but not to Jacob himself.

Humbled

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the Chabad movement, whose festival of liberation from Czarist imprisonment we will be celebrating this Sunday—*Yud-*

Tes-Kislev, the 19th of *Kislev*) provides another way of understanding Jacob becoming diminished as a result of G-d's kindness, in a letter he wrote after being released from prison.

There are two reactions people experience when they are the recipients of divine generosity. Some people develop a sense of superiority and arrogance. This personality type uses his gifts as an instrument of his ego and they tend to look down at those who are not so blessed.

The second approach to becoming a beneficiary of G-d's kindness is the reverse. Whenever this personality type experiences a positive thing in life, he or she becomes more humble because he or she feels an incredible sense of closeness to G-d. Rabbi Schneur Zalman describes this as if G-d was embracing them.

When a person is exposed to something so much greater than himself, it engenders a natural sense of insignificance and humility. When a relatively tall person stands next to a much taller person, he will somehow feel short.

And the more good we experience then, the more humble we become, and the more humble we become the less we feel that G-d still owes us anything.

Jacob was clearly a member of the latter group. Jacob, who had so benefited from G-d's generosity on so many occasions, felt an incredible closeness to G-d.

Hence Jacob states that by virtue of all of the kindnesses that G-d showered upon him, he had become humbled, and therefore prayed to G-d that he continue those blessings despite his newly recognized shortcomings. And though G-d promised him that He would protect him, he agonized over the fact that he might no longer be worthy of those blessings and promises.

"*Humble* ones, the Time of your Redemption has Arrived."

The Midrash states that before the future Redemption, Moshiach will announce the new era by declaring: "**Humble** ones, the time of your Redemption has arrived."

Why, some ask, does the Moshiach, refer to the Jewish people as **humble** ones? Is there no other more appropriate quality to highlight? Why doesn't the Moshiach state: "Righteous ones," or some other similar expression of virtue?

One answer to this question is that as Moshiach is about to usher in a new age of peace and goodness, we are about to experience the greatest manifestation of G-d's kindness. It is imperative, then, more than at any other time, to not follow the approach that causes one to become egotistical and arrogant.

On the contrary, Moshiach exhorts us, to be humble,

because you are about to experience the greatest Divine embrace in history. And even before this becomes a visible reality, we already have to feel the sense of closeness and the resultant humility.

One of the "by-products" of humility is that we never look at another condescendingly. Jealousy, strife and discord give way to peace and harmony. All of the pettiness disappears and the world is more ready than ever to greet Moshiach and usher in the age of *Geulah Shleimah*, the complete Redemption.

ESSAY FIVE

IS THIS HOW WE CELEBRATE A BAR MITZVAH?!

The lesson for a Bar and Bas Mitzvah, the day a Jewish boy or girl is initiated into the Jewish community, is that a Jew has to feel an intense sense of connection to every other Jew.

This feeling must also be accompanied with readiness to sacrifice one's own comfort and convenience.

ESSAY FIVE

IS THIS HOW WE CELEBRATE A BAR MITZVAH?!

The Shechem Massacre Enigma

One of the most bizarre spectacles we are treated to in this week's Torah portion, *Vayishlach*, is the cavalier manner in which Jacob ostracizes his son's *Shimon* and *Levi* for literally wiping out the adult, male population of Shechem. Instead of calling them, bloodthirsty murderers for having perpetrated one of the greatest massacres in Biblical times,

Jacob merely refers to the way the other nations might react to this deed. "You have embarrassed us amongst the dwellers of the land," was Jacob's reaction. In modern parlance we might say, "*A shandeh far di goyim*."

How is it that the great and holy Patriarch Jacob should be more concerned about public relations than with the moral fiber of his sons, who after all, were to become the progenitors of the Jewish nation?

Moreover, how were Shimon and Levi, two of the twelve, *Shivtei Kah* (Tribes of G-d) capable of committing such an apparently dastardly deed?

Furthermore, according to rabbinic tradition, Levi had just reached the age of thirteen. The fact that the Torah designates him as an "*Ish*-man" serves as the basis for the tradition that thirteen is the age of Bar Mitzvah, when one becomes an *ish*, and adult.

How can it be that the very basis of Jewish responsibility is somehow connected to the destruction of Shechem?

Not so Innocent

Maimonides explains that the people of Shechem were not innocent. They were guilty of allowing their mayor's son to rape and torture Dinah the daughter of Jacob. One of the basic rules of humanity – incorporated in the Seven Noahide Laws that were given to Noah and all humankind – is to establish courts to enforce law and order. According to Maimonides, they were all guilty of doing nothing to protect the rights of others.

Hence, by allowing their community to degenerate into anarchy where might makes right, they forfeited their right to life.

Jacob, nevertheless, criticized them because he felt that they were not the ones to take the law into their own hands.

Maimonides thesis, however, does not explain why our sages would find an allusion to the concept of Bar Mitzvah

in this most violent episode. Isn't Bar Mitzvah all about responsibility and conformity with the ideals of Torah?

Isn't the Torah and Mitzvos all about peace?

Indignation

The answer lies in a better understanding of the motivation behind their action. Their actions, though, misguided, was, however, prompted by a sense of righteous indignation. When their sister was abducted and threatened with further harm, they could not remain silent. They had to do something.

The lesson for a Bar and Bas Mitzvah, the day a Jewish boy or girl is initiated into the Jewish community, is that a Jew has to feel an intense sense of connection to every other Jew. This feeling must also be accompanied with readiness to sacrifice one's own comfort and convenience, as Shimon and Levi undoubtedly risked their lives when they attacked the city of Shechem.

A Jew Cannot Stand Idle!

The age of Bar and Bas Mitzvah is when a Jew begins to experience the full impact of their divine potential. And when this potential power is unleashed, a Jew cannot stand idle when another Jew is in trouble. When a Jew is in touch

with his G-dly essence, s/he cannot rest when Jewish values are threatened.

The Maccabees

The Maccabees, the heroes of the upcoming Holiday of Chanukah, inherited this trait of *mesiras nefesh* – the capacity for total devotion and sacrifice to an ideal – from their ancestor Levi.

They could not tolerate the Greek's contamination of the purity of Judaism. Against overwhelming odds, they miraculously defeated the Greeks and insured the purity and therefore the survival of the Jewish religion.

Collective Bar and Bas Mitzvah

The Messianic Age is when we all will come of age and celebrate our collective Bar Mitzvah, at which time we will all experience the full capacity of our devotion to G-d and to our fellow Jew.

Our way of preparing for this is to follow in the ways of the Maccabees and not rest until we have helped every Jew discover their Jewish heritage. We pave the way for the Redemption of the Jewish people from exile by seeing to it that no Jew's spiritual integrity be compromised, so that no Jew will be left behind.

ESSAY SIX

IN TRANSIT

During the brief "intermission" between levels and worlds, the souls of the righteous become disoriented.

In the words of Kabbalah, they then are characterized as being in a state of "*katnus*-lowness." True, their state of "lowness" is higher than their former state of "highness," nevertheless, because they are in a state of flux, they are still on the way, and they require special divine protection.

Not being "home," in the lower sphere or higher, is an invitation for a mishap. The security afforded by a spiritual domicile parallels the security that we enjoy when we are home.

This divine protection, however, must be earned. It is the profound faith and trust in G-d that the righteous exhibit even when they are "on the road" that gets them over the crisis in their transitional period.

ESSAY SIX

IN TRANSIT

Humbled

Jacob is returning to his homeland after being 22 years away. He originally had to flee from his parent's home because his brother, Esau, sought to kill him for having taken the blessings intended for him. Twenty-two years later, after having established a family and amassing great wealth, Esau's anger had not subsided.

Upon his return, Jacob is concerned with the prospects of a conflict with his brother Esau.

In Jacob's prayer to G-d to save him from his brother, Esau's desire for vengeance, Jacob recounts all of the blessings he has received from G-d and says, "I have been humbled (literally: made small) by all the kindness and truth that you did with your servant."

What did Jacob mean by the words "I have been made small" and what relevance did it have to his return to the Land of Israel and his impending conflict with Esau?

Jacob's Spiritual Travels

Chassidic literature explains that Jacob's travels are more than just physical movement from one geographic location to another. Every move that Jacob made was indicative of a state of spiritual transition as well.

This concept, that the righteous are constantly "on the move" has been expressed by our sages in the Talmud when they said, "Torah scholars have no rest in this world or in the next world, as it says: They go from strength to strength, they appear before G-d in Zion." This means that in their pursuit of getting closer to G-d there are infinite levels of change.

More specifically, there are different realms and "worlds" that the righteous go in and out of in their ascent. When they achieve all that there is to achieve in one realm –i.e., when they achieve a level of comprehension of G-d's light on a specific level – they leave it and forge ahead entering into yet a higher realm of spiritual enlightenment..

Temporary Decline on the Way Up

However, during the brief "intermission" between levels and worlds, the souls of the righteous become disoriented. This can be compared to a phenomenon that cults very often prey on people when they are in a state of flux. In that state, the

individual does not have the security of either the place from which he or she has come or the security of reaching and settling down in one's destination.

In the words of Kabbalah, they then are characterized as being in a state of "*katnus*-lowness." True, their state of "lowness" is higher than their former state of "highness," nevertheless, because they are in a state of flux, they are still on the way, and they require special divine protection.

Not being "home," in the lower sphere or higher, is an invitation for a mishap. The security afforded by a spiritual domicile parallels the security that we enjoy when we are home.

This divine protection, however, must be earned. It is the profound faith and trust in G-d that the righteous exhibit even when they are "on the road" that gets them over the crisis in their transitional period.

Jacob's Vulnerability

Jacob's actual travels were commensurate with and expressions of his spiritual growth. As he left *Chutz L'aretz*, the Diaspora, and approached the Holy Land, an ascent from a low level to a high level, he entered into a transitional state of "lowness."

This was a time when he was most vulnerable. Thus Jacob exclaims "I have been humbled" – I am now in a state of "lowness" and feel very vulnerable. Despite all the assurances he had from G-d, the state of "lowness" he was in need of an extra measure of support. His feeling of vulnerability was a signal to enhance his faith and trust in G-d..

We are in the Transitional Period

The lesson from this episode for our times lies in the transitional nature of **our** generation.

The greatest Torah leaders of our time, from the Chafetz Chaim to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, have declared that we are living in the transitional period known in the Talmud as *Ikvata d'm'shicha*," the Heels (or: footsteps) of Moshiach."

During this threshold period, we are closer to the period of Redemption than ever before. Nevertheless, because we are in transition, it can be compared to the period the Jews were in just as they left Egypt, or the state Jacob was in when he arrived in the Land of Israel.

To cope with our state of *Kotonti*-we are lessened, or humbled, we must enhance our faith and trust in G-d that He will keep His many promises to bring the final redemption, a time of peace and holiness for all.

ESSAY SEVEN

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU RODE YOUR DONKEY?

Most material acquisitions are made by people who subordinate themselves to their material possessions; they crave them, they cherish them, they live for them.

Jacob, conversely, makes sure that his material possessions are subordinated to him; they are only used to serve Jacob's true and intrinsic needs and desires which were spiritual.

ESSAY SEVEN

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU RODE YOUR DONKEY?

Why did Jacob Tease Esau with a Display of his Wealth?

In his confrontation with his brother Esau, Jacob describes the wealth that he accumulated in the years that he spent with his uncle Laban in the following manner:

> "And I acquired oxen and donkeys, sheep servants and maidservants."

On the surface it appears that Jacob was attempting to impress his brother Esau with his material possessions. But this is problematic. Jacob knew that Esau's desire to kill him derived from his jealousy. Esau hated Jacob precisely because he thought Jacob had "stolen" the material blessings that he felt were destined only for him. Why then would Jacob — upon his return home — fearing his brother's wrath, speak of his material acquisitions that could only evoke feelings of envy and revenge?

Rashi's Approach

Rashi addresses this question by focusing on the nature of his worldly acquisitions. Jacob does not speak of his agricultural bounty, but of his prosperity with movable items, animals servants etc. Jacob was thus saying to his brother. "You should realize that the blessings that I got from my father that G-d would give me the 'fat of the land and the dew of the heavens' did, in fact, not come true. All my wealth consists of items that were not contained in our father's blessings."

Subordinated to Jacob

There is another approach to this problem that is based on the more literal rendition of the above-mentioned verse. Rather than "And I acquired oxen, donkeys etc." a more literal translation would yield: "And the oxen and donkeys.. were unto me."

This is meant to convey a message how Jacob related to his material possessions. They were all subordinated "unto me." Most material acquisitions are made by people who subordinate themselves to their material possessions; they crave them, they cherish them, they live for them.

Jacob, conversely, makes sure that his material possessions are subordinated to him; they are only used to serve Jacob's

true and intrinsic needs and desires which were spiritual.

By emphasizing the spiritual nature of his material possessions, Jacob sought to assuage the anger of his brother Esau. Esau had no reason to be angry over Jacob's material fortune. He was not competing with Esau for material power, because where Jacob was concerned, the material items were no longer material in essence, once they were brought into Jacob's jurisdiction.

Jacob's and Moshiach's Donkey

This approach can also shed some light on a rather strange statement made by the Midrash on this verse. The "donkeys" Jacob lists among his acquisitions, the Midrash states, refers to the Moshiach who will "ride on a donkey." What connection does Jacob's donkey have to do with Moshiach?

Commentators explain that the Hebrew word for donkey, *Chamor*, derives from a root word that means gross materialism. Moshiach's riding on a donkey means that he exercises complete control over his material possessions. Rather than being subordinated to his material existence, the material existence is subordinated to him.

By relating to his adversarial brother about his acquisition of a donkey, Jacob was informing Esau that he had gained

mastery over his donkey-material existence and that he was therefore ready for the Messianic Age at which time the world will be refined and all people will be able to live together in harmony and peace, because what separates us is the rivalry and jealousy that obsession with material goods engender.

Unfortunately, Esau was not quite ready for this state of affairs at that time.

However, the thousands of years that have elapsed with its cumulative accomplishments have indeed succeeded in preparing the world for the imminent coming of the Moshiach at which time we will all live together in pace and serve G-d in unison.

ESSAY EIGHT

TORAH POWER

When a person is alive, even if it is a day old, it has the capacity to instill fear in the animal.

When a person loses his or her appreciation for life, he or she becomes vulnerable to the attack from all directions.

There is something mystical about life that threatens the most formidable foe.

ESSAY EIGHT
TORAH POWER

Instilled Fear

As recounted in this week's parsha, Jacob's sons wiped out the inhabitants of the city of Shechem because their mayor's son violated their sister Dinah. This action was fraught with danger. It could have easily provoked all the neighboring cities to attack Jacob and his children to avenge the deaths of the Shechemites.

Yet, the Torah testifies this did not happen. In the Torah's own words: And the fear of G-d was on the cities, and they did not chase after the children of Jacob."

The Hebrew word for fear in the Torah is usually "*yirah*." Yet here the Torah uses a rather unusual word *"Chitas."* Why is this term "*Chitas*" used and not "y*iras*," the more commonly used term for fear.

The first time this word appears is earlier in the Torah in the context of G-d's blessing to Noah in the aftermath of

the flood. After blessing Noah to be fruitful and multiply, G-d then tells Noah: "And there shall be a fear and dread of you of all the beasts of the earth..." Here too, the word for "dread of you" is "*chitchem*, employing the same root as in *Chitas*.

Rashi explains the usage of that word in the context of the natural, instinctive fear that animals of the earth have for people. Rashi explains that the word contains the root of the word for life, which is *chai.* When a person is alive, even if it is a day old, it has the capacity to instill fear in the animal. When, however, the person has lost his life, no matter how big the person was, it no longer commands any respect from the beasts of the earth.

Loss of Appreciation for Life Recipe for Attack

From this we can infer that the usage of the word *Chitas* in the context of the fear that Jacob and his sons commanded is likewise associated with life. When a person loses his or her appreciation for life, he or she becomes vulnerable to the attack from all directions.

Whether it is the animal within oneself, or the people who intimidate us on the outside, a person who is imbued with life and enthusiasm for his or her beliefs will not have to worry. All those who threaten our physical and spiritual well-being will cower in our presence because we exude

life. There is something mystical about life that threatens the most formidable foe.

Three Pivotal Torah Texts

The word "*Chitas*" - "fear or dread" - is also said to be an acronym for three pivotal Torah texts: ***Ch****umash* (Five Books of Moses), *Tehillim* (Psalms) and **T**anya (the classic mystical-Chassidic work, authored by R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement, whose day of liberation from Czarist imprisonment we celebrate this Sunday, the 19th day of Kislev).

These three works are representative of all Torah books, in imbuing us with true life. In truth, we possess true life just by virtue of the soul that enters our bodies at birth. However, our souls' presence and life-giving energy is very often concealed. Instead the animal soul is what dominates and has no fear to lead us in the direction it wants to go.

By studying Torah, in general, and these three texts in particular, one's G-dly soul asserts itself. In the presence of such a force, the animal within us retreats.

When a person, who would normally mock us because we are Jews, sees the life and enthusiasm that punctuate our Jewish life, these otherwise antagonistic individuals withdraw in fear and respect from us. How do we develop

this spiritual vigor? One of the ways is by the daily study of *Chitas.*

The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, encouraged that every day we should study one section of the weekly *parsha* , so that in the course of one week, we can complete the entire parsha. In addition, we should recite one section of Psalms daily, so that the entire book of Psalms is completed in the course of a month. Finally, one should also study a section of the *Tanya* so that in the course of the entire year one can complete the entire work. As a result, this course of Torah study will instill in us and evoke from us such spiritual dynamism that all impediments to our spiritual lives will disappear.

Study of Rambam

More recently, the Lubavitcher Rebbe added the study of the entire voluminous work of Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* (also known as the *Yad Hachazakah*, "the Mighty Hand"), to our daily regimen of Torah study. By all Jews uniting in the study of a work that was written for all, young and old, as Maimonides writes in his own introduction, we give each and every individual the ability to access the collective soul of the Jewish nation. Whatever power we elicit by studying Torah, particularly *Chitas,* with the study of the

Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, we reveal all of our collective life-forces, in the presence of which no barrier can stand.

Of all the barriers that have to be removed, the greatest and most stubborn is the barrier known as *Galus,* or exile.

To finally break through this obstacle, we need the power of Torah and particularly the life affirming study of *Chumash, Tehillim, Tanya* (*Chitas)* and *Mishneh Torah* as well. With these powerful life revealing instruments, we will break through the final barriers of exile and usher in the final redemption.

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ESSAY NINE

MOSHIACH FOR DUMMIES AND BEYOND

It is axiomatic in Judaism that a Jew must not only believe in Moshiach's coming but he or she must also yearn for and eagerly anticipate it.

We must want, pray and even "demand" Moshiach's arrival.

The importance of desiring Moshiach and Redemption is dramatically expressed in our daily prayer, the Shemoneh Esrei

ESSAY NINE

MOSHIACH FOR DUMMIES AND BEYOND

Returning the Gifts

We read this week of Jacob's return from Charan, where he had married, established a family and amassed great wealth. Upon his return to the Land of Canaan, he discovered that his brother Eisav, escorted by 400 armed men, was approaching him menacingly.

In response to the threat from Eisav and his henchmen, Jacob prepared a three pronged approach which included prayer, battle and an elaborate gift. The gift proved effective in assuaging Eisav's anger, and for the moment there was a rapprochement between the brothers.

The Midrash records an interesting dialogue between an "*ama d'arah"* and the Talmudic Sage, Rabbi Hoshayah (*Ama d'arah* is the Aramaic version of "*am ha'aretz*," usually translated as "ignoramus," but more precisely as: "A [member of a] nation of the earth." It usually connotes an

uncouth, earthy or materialistic individual rather than one who is unlearned.):

> A certain *Ama d'arah* said to Rabbi Hoshayah: "I would like to relate to you one beautiful teaching. Would you repeat it in public in my name?"
>
> "What is it?" he replied,
>
> He replied, "All of those gifts that our father Jacob gave to Eisav, the nations of the world are destined to return to King Moshiach in the future. What is this based on? 'The kings of Tarshish and the Isles will pay tribute, the kings of Sheva and Seva will offer gifts (Tehillim 72:10).' It does not say 'will **bring**' but rather 'will **return**.'
>
> He said to him, "By your life, this is indeed a beautiful teaching that you said, and I will repeat it in your name."

Focus on the *Ama d'arah*

Why was it necessary to characterize this individual disparagingly as an *Ama d'arah*? From his ability to relate a beautiful commentary on the Torah and cite support for this teaching through a rather astute inference from Tehillim, the title of *Ama d'arah*, with its negative connotation, does not do justice to him. Certainly, the

Torah wants us to avoid using unnecessarily negative characterizations of people. After all, the Talmud relates that the Torah would use a lengthier description of a non-kosher animal to avoid using a pejorative term.

Second, why does the Midrash place so much emphasis on Rabbi Hoshaya's repeating this teaching in the name of its author? Isn't that standard procedure? Do not our Sages teach us in Avos: "One who quotes a saying in the name of its author brings redemption to the world?"

Yearning for Moshiach

The following explanation of the Midrash is based on the Shevet Sofer (a 19th century work by a leading Hungarian Talmudic scholar, grandson of the famed Chasam Sofer).

It is axiomatic in Judaism that a Jew must not only believe in Moshiach's coming but he or she must also yearn for and eagerly anticipate it. We must want, pray and even "demand" Moshiach's arrival. The importance of desiring Moshiach and Redemption is dramatically expressed in our daily prayer, the Shemoneh Esrei:

"Speedily cause the offspring of David Your servant to flourish, and exalt his power with Your deliverance, for we hope for Your deliverance all day."

The meaning of the words "all day" is that the desire and hope for Moshiach should not just be a fleeting feeling but it must pervade our entire day. Moreover, the Chidah (the great 18th century Sephardic Sage) writes that the desire and hope for Redemption, in and of themselves, hasten its happening.

One of the questions the soul is asked in the next world, the Talmud states, is: "Have you eagerly awaited salvation?"

Two Moshiach Meditations

The obvious question for many Jews today is how one who does not feel that sense of yearning and desire for Moshiach develop these feelings?

The answer is similar to that proffered when the question asked is about the command to love G-d. How does one fulfill this commandment if he or she does not currently love G-d? The answer given in Chassidic literature is that the Mitzvah to love G-d is actually a Mitzvah to meditate on G-d's greatness in ways that will generate feelings of love.

Similarly, for us to develop a desire and anticipation for Moshiach and Redemption it is imperative that we meditate on the subjects of Moshiach and Redemption.

There are essentially two meditations, or two models, for our desire for Moshiach and Redemption.

The more materialistic individual will acquire a feeling for the Redemption when he or she reflects on all of the material blessings that will characterize the Messianic Age. In the words of the Rambam, "All of the delights shall be as abundant as the dust of the earth." All pain and suffering will cease; illnesses will be cured and nations will no longer threaten our security. Peace will break out throughout the world. How can one not desire such a utopia?

This model for developing a desire for Redemption is, however, not the ideal. The deeper reason for and meditation on the Redemption is that it will restore G-d's presence to the world. G-d's unity will no longer be compromised. Our world will be inundated with this awareness of G-d. The Sages have declared that G-d, like us, is in exile. He suffers when we suffer. When the Torah describes the future return of Israel from exile it states "G-d will return your captives..." The Hebrew term for "return," Rashi states, actually means "and He will return with your captives" because "G-d finds Himself dwelling with Israel in the distress of their exile, and when they will be redeemed He would be redeemed with them."

When we meditate on this notion that G-d too suffers in exile, it can help us experience a profound desire to see an

end to our Heavenly Father's pain. Indeed, a sensitive child often will care more for the suffering of a beloved parent than for his or her own pain and suffering.

The meditation that focuses on the Divine and spiritual rather than the material benefits of the Messianic Age is an elevated meditation and is the hallmark of the more spiritually sensitive individuals.

We can now better understand the dialogue between the *Ama d'arah*—the materialist and Rabbi Hoshayah.

The Rabbi Hoshaya and Ama d'arah Approches

The name Hoshaya is cognate to the word in Hebrew that means salvation. This particular Sage personified the ultimate reason for the desire for Redemption and salvation—for G-d's sake. His name exemplified his life's desire and passion to bring about the salvation for G-d's sake, consistent with the Chassidic interpretation of the verse in Tehillim that "Deliverance belongs to G-d." Not only is G-d the source of our deliverance, but our quest for deliverance is primarily for G-d's sake.

Thus, the materialist, knowing Rabbi Hoshaya's passionate desire for Redemption for G-d's sake, wanted to know if he would tolerate the first approach to developing a desire for

Redemption; one that would appeal even to the most materialistic individual.

He therefore presented the idea that in the Messianic Age we will have all of Jacob's wealth returned to the Jewish people. The *Ama d'arah* felt that the prospect of regaining that wealth, emblematic of the incredible affluence that we will enjoy in the future, could make even the most materialistic and crass person develop a longing for the Messianic Age. Accordingly, he asked Rabbi Hoshaya, the Redemption obsessed sage, whether he would accept that approach as legitimate and quote him. By quoting him—the materialist—it would help other people lacking in spirituality gain some appreciation for Moshiach.

Rabbi Hoshaya's response was a clear yes. Although he maintained a far more sophisticated approach to Moshiach, Rabbi Hoshaya knew that it was important for everyone fervently to want Moshiach, irrespective of their motives.

One may suggest that the desire and eager anticipation for Moshiach, for any reason, can not only hasten Moshiach's coming but also alter the consciousness of a person with a limited and Galus-tainted mindset. Whereas previously the person concentrated on material matters, now his focus has changed and he is thinking about Moshiach instead. This shift alone may be enough to make the person more

sensitive to and appreciative of the spiritual benefits of Redemption.

This assertion is soundly based on two factors:

First, the person is engaged in a Mitzvah— the longing for Moshiach. Every Mitzvah refines us and allows us to grow to the next level.

Second, the Ba'al Shem Tov taught that a person is situated where his will is situated. If one wants to be in Eretz Yisrael with Moshiach in the rebuilt Beis Hamikdash, then that is where he or she is. Thus the desire for Redemption, for any reason, means that the person's will is in a good and holy place; a place that transcends the stifling and desensitizing parameters of exile. Once a person is in that uplifting atmosphere and "lives with Moshiach," he or she starts the process of spiritual liberation. In this liberated state the Jew develops an even more sophisticated appreciation for Moshiach.

For the Moshiach-Challenged

Rabbi Hoshaya's consent to repeat the *Ama d'arah*'s teaching in his name served a dual purpose. First, Rabbi Hoshayah wanted even the most uncouth and "Moshiach-challenged" individual to feel that Moshiach is important on a very personal level. Second, he also made it clear that

this avenue of approach, wanting Moshiach for the sake of material gain, is the lower, "entry" level for the *ama d'arah* and that one should ideally aspire to the higher, more spiritual reason for wanting Redemption.

This view echoes the Rebbe's interpretation of the Rambam's description of the delicacies of the Messianic Age: "as abundant as the dust of the earth." By comparing the delicacies to dust, the Rebbe explains, the Rambam was attempting to convey a paradoxical message concerning the material blessings of the Messianic Age.

For the materialists, it was important that they know there will be no shortage of their most cherished delicacies. For the Rabbi Hoshayas of the world, it was important to underscore that these delicacies will be of no real value; they will be regarded as no more than the dust of the earth.

The ultimate "delicacy" of the Messianic Age will be to bask in the unrestricted G-dly light and immerse oneself in the sea of G-dly knowledge; as Isaiah (11:9) foresaw "And the entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the sea is covered with water."

ESSAY TEN

THE THREE INSTRUMENTS OF PERFECTION

Contrary to the popular myth that Jews are pacifists and do not believe in self-defense, Jewish law, as stated in the Talmud, makes it clear, "One who comes to kill you, wake up early to kill him."

This is enshrined in Jewish law regarding individuals who find themselves threatened by others and it has been applied equally by our Sages to the Jewish people as a whole when their lives are threatened.

As distasteful as it may be to Jews to engage in battle, survival and the saving of lives takes precedence over our sensibilities.

ESSAY TEN

THE THREE INSTRUMENTS OF PERFECTION

Returning

Jacob is now returning from his twenty-two year sojourn away from home, and is prepared to meet his brother Esau. Jacob sends scouts to determine if his brother still **harbors** hatred towards him for having taken the blessings and is dismayed to learn that his brother **is** coming to greet him with 400 heavily armed men.

Jacob then undertakes to deal with this crisis by doing three things. The first is to prepare for battle by dividing his camp into two so that if Esau should attack, one half of his camp will definitely survive.

Jacob then turns his attention heavenward and proceeds to pray a heartfelt prayer to G-d followed by his preparation of an elaborate gift to send to Esau to pacify him.

Rashi summarizes all three things Jacob had undertaken as follows:

"He prepared himself for three things: "for a gift, for prayer, and for war."

The question can be asked, why **does** Rashi **reverse** the order? Rashi lists the gift first, when, in fact, it was the last thing he did. And war, which was the first thing he prepared himself for, Rashi lists as the last.

Another question can be raised concerning Rashi's choice of language.

Rashi states that "he **prepared** himself for three things." The common Hebrew term for "he prepared" is "heichin," Rashi employs the word "hiskin" which is translated more accurately as "he perfected himself." This word is cognate to the word Tikkun, which means repairing or perfecting; a term that is used by the prophets to describe the Messianic Era when the entire world will be perfected to serve G-d. Why does Rashi employ that term rather than the more conventional one, which actually means "prepared"?

The Torah's Attitude towards War

One can offer the following explanation that conveys a double lesson concerning the Torah's attitude towards war:

Jacob was first and foremost a man **who** detested war and violence. Isaac, his father, said so much when he declared the famous words, "the voice is the voice of Jacob and the

hands are the hands of Esau." Esau, the hunter, identifies himself with warfare and violence. Jacob, in stark contrast, is depicted as a "sincere person who dwells in the tents." And our Sages tell us that that is a reference to the "tents of Shem and Ever" where he studied Torah. Jacob was a man of prayer and Torah study, not a man of war.

Yet, Jacob knew that he had to prepare for the eventuality that he might have to engage in battle with his brother to preserve the lives of his family.

Dispelling the Myth

Contrary to the popular myth that Jews are pacifists and do not believe in self-defense, Jewish law, as stated in the Talmud, makes it clear, "One who comes to kill you, wake up early to kill him." This is enshrined in Jewish law regarding individuals who find themselves threatened by others and it has been applied equally by our Sages to the Jewish people as a whole when their lives are threatened. As distasteful as it may be to Jews to engage in battle, survival and the saving of lives takes precedence over our sensibilities.

It is true that throughout Jewish history, Jews did not take up violence against the anti-Jewish forces of persecution. And it is also true that many Jews would eschew violence because it was against their nature, even when it was to

their detriment. However, the main reason Jews did not resist **was** because in most situations resistance would have been futile, and the Jewish credo does not countenance fighting simply for the sake of showing our valor and might.

Even when we did resist in the past—such as the battles associated with Chanukah and Purim—it was not for political freedom and independence. The battles associated with Purim were for our survival and our very existence and the battles connected to Chanukah were to overthrow the Syrian Greek domination of Israel because they made it impossible for us to live as Jews. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, who lived through and led the Jews during the terrible destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, was against the efforts of the zealots to overthrow the yoke of Roman domination. As long as the Romans did not threaten our lives and our Torah way of life, Rabbi Yochanan was content to live under Roman domination.

But when the Romans, subsequently, ruthlessly massacred untold numbers of Jews and banned the study of Torah, Rabbi Yochanan's disciple's **disciple**, Rabbi Akiva, supported the ill-fated rebellion of Bar Kochba. His approach was not at odds with that of Rabbi Yochanan. The circumstances were totally different.

Jacob thus prepares himself, albeit reluctantly, to fight.

This, then, is the first lesson that we have to be prepared to fight for our survival and security as much as we would rather sit in our comfortable houses and houses of worship and study.

And this explains why Jacob prepared for battle first. Although Jacob certainly preferred to work things out with his brother, as he eventually did by way of his elaborate gift, Jacob had to be fully prepared at the outset to fight. If Esau would have detected Jacob's reticence and vulnerability in the face of war, he would have taken advantage of it and attacked **him**.

Jacob's tough stance, placing the emphasis on preparations for battle, was, ironically, the reason he did not have to fight.

Wake up Early

This idea can actually be traced back to the aforementioned Talmudic dictum, "One who comes to kill you, wake up early to kill him." It does not say, "wake up early and kill him," but rather, "wake up early to kill him." The difference is significant. If it had said, "wake up early **and** kill him" it would have implied that one must actually get up early and kill his enemy. By phrasing it, "**to** kill him" it suggests that all that is necessary is to show your enemy that you are

fully prepared to do battle. That alone can deter the enemy from attacking.

We can now understand why the Torah places the three in the order that war came first, whereas Rashi reverses the order **mentioning the gift** first and **the** war last.

When dealing with the actual situation, it is crucial that we do not allow our natural resistance to fighting weaken our position and show our vulnerability, thereby increasing the chances that there will actually be a war and a war in which we might, G-d forbid, have the upper hand.

However, from the vantage point of one's inner soul and aspiration, Jacob certainly considered battle to be the very last and least preferable thing.

We can now also answer the question why Rashi uses the term "hiskin" which actually means "he perfected himself" rather than the word "hechin" which means "he prepared for."

Rashi is trying to convey that Jacob, notwithstanding his uncompromising readiness for battle as a deterrent to violence, was spiritually not in the mode of battle. And, indeed, he made sure that his personality would be perfected so that battle was the farthest thing from his heart and soul, although it was the closest thing in terms of preparedness. On the outside, Jacob was a fierce soldier, on the inside, he was the ultimate **man** of peace.

Perfect Yourself

On a deeper level, we might suggest that by employing the term "hiskin-he perfected himself" which is related to the concept of perfecting the world in the Messianic Age, Jacob was actually laying the ground work for the age in which Jacob and Esau **would** experience a complete rapprochement.

Before we can repair the entire world, including the Esau's of the world that seek to harm us, we must perfect ourselves. We must undergo an internal transformation that involves the three elements of gifts, prayer and war. And, in truth, all three are associated with and contained within prayer.

The "gifts" are representative of all the acts of kindness that we show others. Before we pray, the Talmud instructs us, we should give tzedakah. This is based on the verse in Psalms, "I come with righteousness to see Your face." Before we come face to face with G-d in prayer, we must first do an act of kindness. And although the primary objective of tzedakah is to help the other, it is also central to one's own self perfection. And more specifically, the way we prepare ourselves to be liberated from our internal exile—which is how we also get out of the physical constraints of exile—is to give tzedakah, as the Talmud states: "The Jewish people will be redeemed only through

tzedakah." When we help someone materially or spiritually to get out of their own straits, it elicits G-d's force of liberation to help us be liberated from all that keeps us in our internal and external exile.

However, tzedakah must be followed by prayer. Prayer is described by our Talmudic sages as "service of the heart." It is the spiritual exercise that "messages" our heart to create feelings of love for and awe of G-d. It helps to release the hidden love that we all possess but is in captivity. The word for prayer in Hebrew is Tefilah, which has a dual meaning of judgment and attachment. Prayer is a time of self-examination and self-judgment.

And finally, liberation from our internal exile requires engaging and fighting the internal Esau. The Zohar states that prayer is a time of battle. And while prayer is ultimately an intimate conversation and relationship with G-d that transcends war, we cannot ignore the intensity of the exile mentality within us. If we are not prepared for battle—though it is not our primary desire and objective—the internal exile conditions will color and taint our ability to reach the ideal state of communion with G-d during our prayers.

ESSAY ELEVEN

WE ENVY YOU!

The Alter Rebbe referred to Moses' vaunted praise as the most humble man on the face of the earth and asked:

How could Moses be so humble when he knew his towering greatness?

Moses was given a preview of all future generations of Jews. When he saw the final generation before the coming of Moshiach and their self-sacrifice for Torah and Mitzvos, he was humbled."

The mere fact that despite all of the exile conditions, we have done everything in our power to hasten Moshiach's coming earns us the envy of all our forebears.

They will marvel at our faith, perseverance and self-sacrifice in the face of unprecedented darkness.

ESSAY ELEVEN

WE ENVY YOU!

Dealing with the Threat of Esau

Jacob is now returning home from Charan and discovers that his brother Esau was coming towards him with 400 armed men. Esau was still angry at Jacob for having "appropriated" the blessings of their father, Isaac. In response to this ominous threat, Jacob develops a strategy that included sending his brother an elaborate gift to help assuage his hostility.

Every detail of Torah is instructive. Esau symbolizes the obstacles to our Jewish lives and every aspect of Jacob's attempt at rapprochement is to be seen as lessons for us in removing these obstacles and even converting them into opportunities, that will enable us to realize our goal. That goal is the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption at which time, our Sages tell us, Esau will have been rehabilitated.

Bearing this in mind we must find meaning in the details of Jacob's instructions to his servants as to what they should say to Esau:

The Three Questions

> "When my brother Esau encounters you and questions you, saying, 'Whose are you? Where are you going? And to whom belong all of these things before you?' You should say, 'We belong to your servant Jacob. This is a gift (mincha) sent to my master, to Esau, and, behold, he is himself is behind us.'"

One of the Chassidic Masters explains that these three questions parallel the three questions mentioned in Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) that are intended to keep us from sin: "Reflect on three things, and you will not come to the handle of sin: From where to you come? Where are you going? And before whom are you going to give a judgment and accounting?"

Isn't it strange that Esau—who symbolizes the evil impulse within us—should ask the same questions that are designed to steer us away from sin?

Chidushei Harim clarifies that when Esau asks these questions they are meant not to inspire us to be more

conscientious Jews, but on the contrary, they are intended to demoralize us and get us to become depressed. Chidushei Harim, however, does not explain what these questions are about when they come from Esau.

Upon some reflection we may suggest the following three arguments the internal Esau poses to us to get us from realizing our goal.

Our goal is a grandiose one of changing the world and preparing it for the coming of Moshiach and the final Redemption. And we accomplish this by staying on the road towards that goal. By performing Mitzvot, learning Torah—specifically the parts of Torah that prepare us for the higher spiritual dimension of the Messianic Age—praying and demanding the Redemption, we will reach our destination.

Esau, however, is displeased that we are even thinking in terms of that goal and poses three challenges to us:

Humble Beginnings

The first question/challenge, "Whose are you" which corresponds to the question "where do you come from" in Ethics of the Fathers. It is meant to prevent us from even starting our journey—or derailing us if we began the journey—by pointing to our humble origins. "Who do you

think you are that you are considering a life of spiritual achievement that would result in changing the world? The evil impulse chastises us. "You have but humble beginnings. You are not the scion of some illustrious family. You are a nobody. Give up your pipe dreams. Think small!

Elusive Goal

The second question, "where are you going?" is intended to get us off track when we fail to heed his demoralizing advice to think small. When he sees that we have taken off with gusto and are on the way to reaching our destination he quickly sends us a second message intended to derail us: "Where do you think you're going? You'll never get there. It is so far and your objective is so elusive? Slow down, or better still, go back, forget about your grandiose goals."

Future Embarresment?

The third question posed by the internal Esau when he sees that we ignored his second admonition and we continue to stubbornly trek ahead even when it gets tough, and, as the saying goes, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." The evil impulse pulls out his last arrow from his quiver:

"Look at the future. No matter how good you are, when you arrive at your destination—the Messianic Age—in a world of perfection, when the righteous of the past will be brought back to life, of what value will be all of your accomplishments? You will look foolish relative to the standards that will be the norm in the future. You will be insignificant in the presence of these towering personalities. Why waste your time trying to get to a place that will only bring you shame and dejection. Here in the less than perfect world you can be someone special. Why clamor for the time when you will be reduced to a virtual nobody?"

These are the three challenges that prevent us from realizing any positive goal, but especially the goal of bringing the Redemption.

How do we respond to these challenges?

No Jew Without a Background

Jacob already gave us the answer in his instructions to his servants:

The answer to the first challenge as to "who do we think we are considering our humble beginnings" is that "we belong to your servant Jacob." Every Jew has an illustrious background. Every Jew is a descendent of Jacob (who embodied and transmitted the collective energies of Isaac

and Abraham). There is no such thing as a Jew with no background! We were all empowered to change the world because of the traits that we inherited from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Poor Man's Offering

The response to the second challenge of Esau that the goal is elusive is contained in Jacob's continuing instruction to his servants, "This is a gift (mincha) sent to my master, to Esau." A mincha is a modest offering. In the days of the Temple, only the poorest people would bring a mincha that consisted of flour and oil in place of the more elaborate animal sacrifice. Yet, it is the small gesture of a poor man that G-d cherishes because, as our Sages state, "he is actually bringing his own soul." A poor person instills his heart and soul in the offering. Our small efforts are not any less meaningful than the major achievements of the spiritually affluent.

Moreover, the mincha is being offered to Esau. This is a way of saying to Esau. Thank you for your efforts to ensnare us and deter us. This is what makes our offering so much more meaningful. We owe you, Esau, a debt of gratitude, because, ironically, you are what makes our paltry mincha possess the power that it possesses.

The Giant and the Dwarf: Who Dwarfs Whom?

The refutation of his final challenge that we will be "nobodies" in the future is contained in the words, "behold, he himself is behind us.'" This can mean that contrary to the argument that we will lose our identities because our achievements pale compared to our forbears, the response is that, on the contrary, "Jacob will be **behind** us."

There is a dual meaning to that phrase.

First, it means that we have the power to get us over the top because we are the proverbial dwarf that stands on the shoulders of the giant who can see farther. We will get the credit for bringing the Redemption because, as our Sages declare, "A Mitzvah is credited to the one who completes it." We are the ones who will finish the job, so notwithstanding our status as dwarfs compared to our ancestors, we will not be "nobodies." Even among the illustrious leaders of yesteryear we will be prominent. Jacob—and all the other greats—will point to us and declare, "You were the ones that made all of our work bear fruit. You completed and validated all of what we've begun."

But there is a second and more powerful meaning to that expression that "Jacob is behind us." Not only are we the ones to finish the job and deserve to get the credit for it; we have a distinction even in comparison to all the spiritual titans of the past. Our generation's self sacrifice in times of

spiritual darkness make us unique. That a Jew growing up in the assimilated, affluent Western world eschews materialism for Judaism, shuns wealth for Torah knowledge, and resists the alluring temptations of the secular world for the observance of Mitzvot is no less heroic than the Jews who risked their lives in the former Soviet Union to preserve Judaism. The combined sacrifices of the modern day Jew who has resisted the twin pressures of persecution and assimilation puts our generation on a pedestal no earlier generation can rival!

This last point—while sounding somewhat exaggerated and pretentious—was actually made by the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Schnuer Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement and the author of the Chassidic classic, the Tanya, whose day of liberation from Czarist imprisonment we will be observing this coming week, on the 19th day of Kislev).

The Alter Rebbe referred to Moses' vaunted praise as the most humble man on the face of the earth. The question is asked, how could Moses be so humble when he knew his towering greatness? The answer provided by the Alter Rebbe was that according to the Talmud and Midrash, Moses was given a preview of all future generations of Jews. When he saw the final generation before the coming of Moshiach and their self-sacrifice for Torah and Mitzvot, he was humbled."

We do not have to worry about our position in the future and how we will be judged. The mere fact that despite all of the exile conditions, we ask for—nay demand Moshiach—and do everything in our power to hasten his coming, that itself places us in the category of people that Moses, Jacob and all of our forebears will look up to. They will marvel at our faith, perseverance and self-sacrifice in the face of unprecedented darkness.

In a similar vein, the Rebbe turned a person's Jewish life around when he informed the Rebbe that he was about to embark on a spiritually destructive path of intermarriage. Rather than castigating him for his plan the Rebbe told him "I envy you. I do not have your challenge. And meeting it makes you unique." These were the powerful words that the Rebbe told a Jew who was standing precariously on the precipice of his Jewish life ready to fall into the abyss. And it was to this Jew—and all of our generation who have similar challenges in one form or another—that the Patriarchs, Moses and Moshiach will say to us: "We envy you!"

ESSAY TWELVE

RETURNING WITH LIGHT AND JOY

The ultimate goal of Teshuvah, of return to G-d is "good deeds."

The process of Teshuvah should not engender a desire to escape reality and responsibility but rather it should serve as a force of positive energy that will lead to more and more good deeds; more and more positive engagement with the physical world

ESSAY TWELVE

RETURNING WITH LIGHT AND JOY

Laban's Lifestyle Didn't Rub Off

Jacob is now returning from the 22 years he spent with his uncle Laban and on the road. Fearing that his brother Esau was still harboring a grudge against him and wished to do him harm, Jacob sends scouts to determine his intentions. Jacob told the scouts to inform Esau that:

> "I have lived with Laban and have been delayed until now."

Rashi comments that the word *garti*, which means "I have lived," is the numerical value of 613. Jacob was thus saying to Esau:

> "I have lived with Laban, but I have observed the 613 commandments and I have not learned from his evil deeds."

We can understand what Jacob's message was attempting to convey based on the way Isaac made Jacob's security

(and by extension, the security of the Jewish people) lie in his commitment to the values of Torah and its commandments. Jacob was thus informing Esau, don't think that I have lost touch with my values and I am vulnerable. Indeed, Jacob averred, "I have observed al the 613 commandments, and I have not allowed anything that Laban stood for rub off on me."

A question has been raised about the words Rashi says Jacob employed: Why did he have to add the words "And I have not learned from his evil deeds," after having declared that he observed all of the 613 commandments? Isn't it obvious that if he observed all of the 613 commandments that he had not emulated Laban's evil ways?

The True Meaning ofTeshuvah

To answer this question we should analyze a similar apparent redundancy in the Talmudic statement that describes the purpose of wisdom:

> "The ultimate goal of wisdom is Teshuvah (repentance or return) and good deeds."

The difficulty with this statement is that Teshuvah usually translates as repentance. Why is it assumed that the person who is endowed with wisdom is a sinner? It should have stated that the goal of wisdom is good deeds, and in the

event that someone violated that order and did not do the good deeds they should do Teshuvah? In addition, the question can be asked, if one has returned to G-d by repenting, it is obvious that they will perform good deeds.

The answer, provided by the Alter Rebbe (the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement, the anniversary of his release from Czrist imprisonment we will be observing this coming Friday) in his work *Likkutei Torah* lies in a deeper understanding of the word Teshuvah.

Teshuvah is not just the expression of remorse for one's transgressions and returning from a life of sins and iniquity. Even a perfectly righteous person can and must "do" Teshuvah. When Yom Kippur is over, one can still be required to do Teshuvah, despite that fact that he had already acquired atonement for all his sins and now has a clean slate.

Teshuvah means to return. And return implies that we have been someplace else and have journeyed away from that place and now we must return to it. That journey does not necessarily involve sin and evil.

Where do We Return?

Where is that place to which we must return?

The answer is that every one of us possesses a G-dly soul which originates in a higher sphere of reality—a G-dly reality. Every soul resides in a world of utter truth and holiness. And these pure souls are thrust into physical bodies and inhabit a world that is full of falsehood. It is a world whose consciousness is far removed from the original state of mind the soul experienced in the world of souls.

When the soul realizes how far it has traveled and distanced itself from its heavenly source it relays a message to our conscious mind that we must do something to get the soul back to its original state. In some cases it can be the realization of how low we have fallen. When a person hits rock bottom they are awakened to that reality and wish to come back.

But, even a completely righteous person, nay, especially a righteous person; by studying Torah they realize that their soul has undergone a transformation due to its involvement with the body and physical world. And when these individuals become aware of the distance their souls traveled from their source, they develop a powerfully passionate desire to return.

Escape?

The problem with this inspiration is that it can take two forms: It can lead a person to want to escape this physical world; if not literally, to end one's physical existence, then it can manifest itself in another undesirable way. Those whose soul is on fire and wish to return to a more spiritual existence will divorce themselves from dealing with physical world. They may decide to engage in self-mortification or simply forget about their families and the need to make a difference in the world that everyone else inhabits.

This type of escape may be cloaked in a pious mantle that they want to get closer to G-d; they want to satisfy their soul's yearning to be "back home."

However, that was not G-d's intention when he sent this inspiring thought to the person that he or she should return to G-d because it is out of sync with the very reason G-d placed the ethereal soul in an ephemeral body—"to make the world a dwelling place for G-d."

The ultimate goal of Teshuvah, of this return to G-d thus, is "good deeds." The process of Teshuvah should not engender a desire to escape reality and responsibility but rather it should serve as a force of positive energy that will lead to more and more good deeds; more and more positive engagement with the physical world

Glowing Good

Moreover, the word "tov" which means good in Hebrew also has the connotation of something that glows with G-dly radiance. This translation we find in the description of Moses' birth in the beginning of the Book of Exodus. The Torah states that when Moses was born his mother "saw that he was good." The Talmud, cited by Rashi, explains that it means that the entire house was filled with light.

Thus, our return to G-d must not only inspire us to do more good deeds, the deeds must also radiate with joy and beauty.

Hence, the goal and objective of wisdom, according to the Talmud, is to help us get in touch with our soul's desire to return to G-d—Teshuvah.

However, the caveat here is that this desire to return has to be geared to greater involvement and engagement with the world we inhabit. And even that is not enough; the goal is to contribute to it by illuminating it by bringing light and joy to the world in which we live by way of performing Mitzvot with joy and enthusiasm.

With this introduction we may understand what Jacob meant to tell Esau:

Jacob's Radiant and Down-to-Earth Teshuvah

"I have lived with Laban and **now** I am returning. The Midrash tells us that the Biblical term *atah*, which means now, implies the act of Teshuvah. Teshuvah is not about the past and the future; it is about a paradigm shift now.

Jacob is thus saying. I have lived with the wicked Laban. That experience has not tarnished my soul. On the contrary, it caused my soul to be ignited. I am therefore now returning (Teshuvah), both literally and figuratively.

Jacob then adds, "I want you to know that I have not learned from his evil ways." This does not just mean that Jacob did not degenerate to Laban's level, G-d forbid. It also suggests that his deeds did not become diminished in their radiance.

When the soul is on fire one may think that the practical Mitzvos are only of secondary importance and take a back seat to spiritual experiences. This Teshuvah experience, Jacob was informing Esau, did not cause him to neglect his engagement with this world in any way shape or form.

On the contrary, Jacob was in effect saying, "I have acquired cattle etc. and all the material goods, to underscore that I am not trying to escape this world. I have not absorbed his evil ways, means I have not taken the good, or light out of the 613 Mitzvot that I have observed. I not only live by those Divine commands I love them."

Messianic Passion should not Diminish Observance

We are at the tail end of the period known as exile. In a sense we are in the process of returning to the period of holiness that prevailed at the time the Temple stood in Jerusalem, when G-d's presence permeated the Land of Israel. And the more we think about returning, especially when we realize how low we've fallen as a society, we are filled with yearning and passion for the future.

The lesson of Jacob is that we are not to let the passion of Teshuvah-return to diminish either the quantity of Mitzvos or the quality. This return to be successful requires total devotion to the ideal of making this world a G-dly abode; a world that is illuminated by Torah and Mitzvos that we observe will utter joy.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

IN UNITY THERE IS NO FEAR

Instead of understanding the division of Jacob's entourage into two camps as a consequence of fear, the Chassidic translation reverses it.

Jacob's fear was actually a consequence of the division of his entourage.

Jacob was well aware of the fact that when the Jewish people are united they are invincible; when they are divided they are vulnerable.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

IN UNITY THERE IS NO FEAR

Fear of Division

> "And Jacob feared and it distressed him greatly and he divided the people that were with him and the sheep, the cattle and the camels into two camps."

The straightforward understanding of the text is that as a result of the fear of the possibility of his brother Esau's attack, he was forced to divide his entourage into two separate camps. The Torah then gives the rationale for this move; it was to secure at least half of his family and followers in the event of an attack. Even if one half would be defeated, the other half will be able to escape.

A Chassidic approach to this verse translates it the very opposite way: Instead of understanding the division of his people into two camps as a consequence of fear, the Chassidic translation reverses it. His fear was a consequence of the division of his entourage. Jacob was well aware of the fact that when the Jewish people are

united they are invincible; when they are divided they are vulnerable.

Cause of Division

One can take this approach a step further. Not only was Jacob alluding to the dangers inherent in division, he was also suggesting what is the root cause of divisiveness. After stating that Jacob divided the people, the verse continues: "and the sheep, the cattle and the camels into two camps."

The connection between Jacob's fear—that was precipitated by the division in his camp—and the sheep, cattle and camels may be suggested as follows:

The principal cause of division between people is due to the fights about material possessions; one's "sheep, cattle and camels."

Three Animal Souls

On a deeper spiritual level the "sheep, cattle and camels," refers to our animal souls that promote our self-interest above all. The animal in us is the principal cause of strife and division in our communities.

However, the Torah lists three types of animals: "sheep, cattle and camels." There are three types of animal souls;

three personality types. A "sheep" is a quiet and timid animal that is only interested in satisfying its own desires; it is suggestive of one whose interests are purely sybaritic.

The reference to cattle that include the bull alludes to the aggressive personality type that will trample and even gore anyone who gets in his way.

What's Wrong with the Camel?

The Hebrew word for camel-Gamal derives from the root that means to "give." The camel, perhaps more than any animal, helps to carry people and their possessions long distances. It is the ultimate expression of giving and sharing the other's burdens.

So what is wrong with that? Why does it cause division?

Perhaps the answer is that it is a form of good that involves a quid pro quo. Just as the camel expects to be fed, the camel personality type will always offer to give; but for something tangible in return.

When these personality types do not see what is in it for them they turn against the other and discord ensues.

Tragedy in India

Whatever the root cause of division one thing is clear. It weakens us as a people and makes us vulnerable. Unity is by far our greatest weapon against our enemies who seek our destruction. To be sure, unity does not mean that we must agree on everything. It means that we have to at least agree that we are one people, with one G-d, Who guides our common destiny.

The tragic events of the past two weeks have achieved at least one positive outcome. It has generated unprecedented unity in the Jewish community. Virtually every community has expressed sorrow and solidarity with the victims of the terrible atrocity committed against the Chabad House and others in India. Tragically, it takes catastrophic events such as what occurred in India to recognize that all the things that divide us are superficial; they are the products of our animal soul.

Since most discord and strife derives from either the obsession with the pursuit of pleasure (sheep), or aggression (cattle) or the false altruism (camel), when our system is jolted—as it was recently—the animal in us ceases to exert that much influence, enabling the true idealism of the G-dly soul to shine. And when our G-dly soul dominates the result is solidarity and unity.

Thus in the Messianic Age we are promised that there will be no war and no strife.

Maimonides explains that the reason for that is because there will be an abundance of material goods as "numerous as the dust of the earth, and our sole preoccupation will be to know G-d."

What Maimonides means is that all of the material interests will be relegated to the level of "dust" in our minds. As a result, we will no longer be driven by the pursuit of physical pleasure. Our animal souls will thus become tame; the wolf and the lamb will coexist. This means, among other things, that we will no longer use our aggressiveness to devour others, and our "camel," our desire to give and help will not be motivated by our egos. It will derive from our love for others based on our realization of our inherent G-dly soul that we all share equally.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

REPROGRAMMING

Sometimes the threat to our existence comes from the right; sometimes from the left.

Sometimes it comes from secularists and sometimes from religious fanatics.

Frequently the assault is directed against our bodies and sometimes the attack is geared to undermine our soul.

Be prepared for all forms of attack.

Formulate a strategy that can address any and all possible threats.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

REPROGRAMMING

The Mysterious Attacker

In this week's parsha the Torah relates how Jacob was attacked by a mysterious individual, who is identified by our sages as Esau's guardian angel. In the ensuing struggle, Jacob does not allow the angel to leave until he offered him his blessing. The angel proceeds to rename Jacob Israel, at which point Jacob asks him for his name. The angel replies: "why do you ask for my name?

Two questions present themselves immediately:

First, why did Jacob want to know the name of angel? What benefit would accrue to Jacob if he knew the name of the angel? Was Jacob planning to give the angel another name?

Second, why couldn't the angel divulge his name? Why was the angel so secretive?

Rashi addresses the second question and explains that an angel does not have one constant name. It changes depending on the particular mission it is sent to fulfill.

Rabenu Bachaye (a thirteenth century Bible commentator) provides two other explanations for the angel's reluctance to reveal his name: By giving his name, it would have suggested that he deserved the credit for his actions—in this case, the blessing he gave Jacob. In truth, an angel is no more than a servant serving and representing his Master.

The angel wanted to impress upon Jacob that the blessings he gave him and the change of name from Jacob to Israel was at G-d's behest.

A third explanation cited by Rabenu Bachaye is that the angel who lost the "wrestling match" to Jacob did not want to have his name associated with its defeat.

However, none of these explanations explain why Jacob wanted to know the name of the angel in the first place.

The Angel's Software

The answer lies in the circumstances of his encounter with the angel. Jacob was on his way to encounter his brother Esau when he returned to retrieve some small jugs. When he was alone, Jacob was attacked by this angel and injured

by him. Jacob certainly understood that this fight was a portent of the struggle in the future of his descendants, the Jewish nation, with the Esau's of the world. As our Sages point out, his injury was a sign that in the future the Jewish people will go through much suffering and travail. But in the end they will be healed and emerge victorious over their enemies who seek to destroy them.

When Jacob saw how formidable an opponent the angel was, he wanted to know what his strength was. Jacob wanted to know the "program" that animated the angel. Once he had the angel's "software" he could always formulate a response to the threats in the future by anticipating the nature of the assault.

Threats form Right, Left and Center

Now we can better understand the angel's response. The angel reveals to him that there is no one program. The obstacles posed by the Esau's of the world change from one situation to the next. Sometimes the threat to our existence comes from the right. And sometimes it comes from the left. Sometimes it comes from pagans; sometimes from Christianity and currently it comes primarily from Islam.

Sometimes it comes from secularists and sometimes it comes from religious fanatics.

Frequently the assault is directed against our bodies as in the story of Purim and sometimes the attack is geared to undermine our soul as in the upcoming holiday of Chanukah.

The angel was giving Jacob sound advice: Don't prepare for any individual form of attack; be prepared for all of the forms, for it can come from any and every direction. Instead of formulating a strategy for one or several modes of attack, formulate a strategy that can address any and all possible threats.

What was the strategy to which the angel was alluding?

Israel: No More Vulnerability

When a Jew views himself or herself merely as a "Jacob," which means "heel," he or she is vulnerable. A heel is one who follows others and has no self-confidence and respect. They can easily be victimized and harmed.

From now on the angel told Jacob your name is Israel, which means to be a master of your own destiny. You are leaders and not followers.

And while the name Jacob was not erased from the Torah and remained his name, it is because there are times when we must be prepared to follow the lead of others who take us in the right direction. We should never let our self-

respect turn into arrogance that we can never accept advice and guidance from others. But we must realize that each and every one of us is destined to a leader; destined to illuminate and inspire, not to dominate and control. The Israel dynamic must be tempered by the Jacob attitude.

No Need for Committees and Commissions to Determine Cause of Anti-Semitism

Instead of forming committees and spending millions of dollars on research how to deal with one specific threat or problem, we should focus on instilling in our children—and ourselves—the notion that we are the Children of Israel. When we respect ourselves and our G-d given talents and mission, we do not have to necessarily know and understand the name of the enemy and its ideology to defeat him.

As we stand now ready enter into the age of Redemption it is even more crucial not to waste time and energy on identifying the dynamics of anti-Semitism, trying to understand why they hate us and fighting us. It certainly is counterproductive to blame ourselves for their animosity towards us. The most potent force we have to win the war and win adherents to our cause is to recognize who we are as a people and as individuals and live our lives accordingly. (Needless to say, this does not mean we should not defend

ourselves against any attack; but our mindset must be forward looking, upbeat, inspirational and proud.)

Equipped with the humility of Jacob and the pride and determination of Israel, all of our enemies will disappear.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

BEING ALONE AND THE LONE JUG OF OIL

When you are all alone in your struggle for good, you are not truly alone.

There is a G-dly flame that burns in the heart of every Jew that accompanies us in all of our positive efforts.

We are never alone.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

BEING ALONE AND THE LONE JUG OF OIL

Risking his Life for a Few Jugs

Jacob is on his way to meet his brother after a more than two decade hiatus. Esau had vowed to kill Jacob, and Jacob was uncertain as to whether his brother's anger had subsided.

To prepare for any and every eventuality, Jacob prepares for this confrontation with prayer, war and gift giving. In the process of sending his lavish gift of cattle and servants,

Jacob suddenly reminds himself that he had left something behind. Jacob then proceeds to retrieve his lost belongings and gets into a wrestling match with an angel, identified in our Oral tradition as Esau's guardian angel. The angel tried to kill Jacob, but Jacob prevailed sustaining only an injury to his thigh, from which he healed quickly.

Jacob, in effect, risked his life to retrieve a few jugs. Why would he do it?

Jug of the Menorah Oil

One answer to this question lies in the way the Torah describes how Jacob remained alone. The Torah states "and Jacob was left alone." With just a slight change of one letter, the phrase reads: And Jacob was left to [retrieve] his jug." In other words, he put his life in danger to retrieve a mere jug.

According to a Midrashic interpretation, this jug was none other than the jug of oil that was discovered several millennia later in the Temple that miraculously lasted for eight days. Thus, the entire Chanukah story began thousands of years earlier when Jacob, realizing the incredible value of that lone cruse of oil, risked his life to ensure that it would be around to bring the light of Chanukah to his descendants.

How are we to understand this remarkable jug of oil? And how do we apply the message of Jacob going to great lengths to retrieve it.

Furthermore, the text actually states that he was left alone. Using Midrashic license (the license given to the rabbis by the Torah to uncover hidden layers of meaning embedded and encoded in every word and letter of the Torah) our Sages revise that to read "for his jug." But even when the Midrash discovers a new layer of meaning, it does not negate the simple and straightforward meaning of the text.

Moreover, the multiple layers of a given text are meant to complement each other. In light of this, we must understand how Jacob being alone ties in with the fact that he went to retrieve this special jug of oil.

Our Allies Disappeared

As discussed in another essay on Parshas Vayeitzei, there are many times when the Jew is left alone. Even those, nay especially those, whom we have helped, have abandoned us and our not around to defend our national interests and survival when we need it most.

But, even within the Jewish community, there are times when we fight for a certain cause, and we discover that all those who we thought were on our team are suddenly nowhere to be found. It is reminiscent of the story of how when Moses went to Pharaoh with the elders, by the time he got to him, all of the elders slipped away one by one. It becomes very lonely and we are left with a negative feeling, why bother; our efforts are to no avail.

A Jew Never Goes Alone

And here the Torah tells us that this situation is not a new one. It started with our forefather Jacob who found himself to be all alone. And it was at this time that Jacob realized

that there was a G-dly spark within him that would accompany him wherever he would go. From that time onward it has been said that a Jew never goes alone.

Whenever we are in a rut, we must realize that the G-dly spark within us accompanies us. In the words of the Psalmist: "I am with him in his distress." This realization is most comforting.

When our ancestors discovered that they were standing alone. The Syrian Greeks tried to stamp out their adherence to pure, unadulterated Judaism; the Jewish Hellenists tried to foist their ways on their co-religionists. And the loyalists were just a handful of stubborn Jews, who must have felt abandoned and forlorn.

And the question arises: Where did they get their strength to carry on? Where did they get the inspiration to fight, risking their lives for their beliefs?

Empowered by Jacob

The answer was: Jacob had already demonstrated that when you are all alone in your struggle for good, you are not truly alone. There is a G-dly flame that burns in the heart of every Jew that accompanies us in all of our positive efforts. We are never alone.

Light of the Past and Future

In other rabbinic sources we are informed that the lone cruse of oil that lasted for eight days had an even earlier source. The light that this cruse of oil generated was the same light that was created on the very first day of creation before the sun was created. That light was a spiritual light, so powerful and holy, that it was preserved for the future Messianic Age.

However during the miracle of Chanukah, G-d revealed this primordial light, and gave us a sample and taste of the future Messianic Age when this light will be revealed for the entire world for eternity.

This light that was created and introduced into the world on day one of creation was accessed by Jacob and transmitted to the heroes of Chanukah. With the establishment of Chanukah as a Jewish Holiday, this light has become accessible to every Jew, especially now as we are poised to enter into the final Age of Redemption.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE WORLD OF OTHERNESS

Perhaps, Jacob's fear of fighting with Esau was that if he acquired some negative traits as a consequence of his need to engage in violence it would scar his spiritual genetic makeup.

And as a result, the "otherness" of his progeny would be lost. His descendants would be made ordinary and incapable of bringing the otherness of Divine light to their lives. They would be condemned forever to the quotidian state of Galus.

To ensure that the future of the Jewish people would be extraordinary, Jacob resisted having to engage in even the most kosher form of violence thereby guaranteeing his progeny an early entry into the illuminating otherness of Moshiach.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE WORLD OF OTHERNESS

Jacob's Distress

Jacob returned from a 22 year sojourn with his uncle Laban with a huge entourage that included his wives, children, servants, flocks of sheep, cattle and camels etc. Jacob discovers that his brother Esau, who pledged to kill him, was approaching with 400 armed men. The Torah records Jacob's feelings at the prospects of war with his brother:

> "And Jacob was very frightened and it distressed him. So he divided the people who were with him, the flocks, the cattle and the camels into two camps."

Rashi makes the observation that there is a repetitive expression here: It describes Jacob as both frightened and distressed. Why the dual expression?

Rashi explains: "And he was frightened lest he be killed, and it distressed him were he to kill others."

The Four Questions

Commentators ask: We can easily understand why he was frightened lest he be killed, but why was he so distressed that he might kill others? Weren't the others he might have to kill, out to kill him? Isn't there a Mitzvah, a commandment, to defend yourself and your family?

The Chassidic work *Orach L'chaim* answers that Jacob was distressed that he would be compelled to kill his own brother. However, Rashi states that he was concerned that he would kill "others," making it clear that he was concerned about killing any of Esau's men, not just Esau.

A second question may be raised. The Torah states that in response to his fear and distress he divided the camp into two parts. By dividing his camp into two sections, the Torah continues, it would enable one half of his camp to escape harm. This clearly ameliorates his concern of being killed, but how does dividing his camp into two address his distress at having to kill others? If he were forced to kill Esau's henchmen he would have to kill them even if half of his entourage could escape.

A contemporary work, *Avir Yosef,* answers the first question by observing that Jacob was concerned that the justified killing of his enemy would plant feelings of violence in him. Jacob was distressed that his pure soul

would be sullied by the violence in which he would be forced to engage.

However, why should his fear of instilling a violent streak in his psyche be a reason for him to divide his camp into two?

The Maharal in his work Gur Aryeh asks a third question: Why does Rashi say that he was distressed that he might have to "kill others." What does Rashi mean by "others?" Why not simply state that he was distressed that he would kill Esau.

A fourth question can be raised. Why did Rashi have to mention the word "others" entirely. Obviously, if Jacob were forced to kill, it is self-understood that he would be killing others, not himself or people close to him?

The classic work *Semuchim Lo'ad* argues that the word "others" alludes to the Sage Rabbi Meir, one of Esau's descendants, who was given the moniker "others" in the Talmud. Jacob was concerned that killing Esau would eliminate the possibility for the emergence of the great luminary, Rabbi Meir.

While this is an ingenious explanation, it leaves unanswered the question why he was concerned about Rabbi Meir specifically. Furthermore, why is Rabbi Meir alluded to with the sobriquet "others"?

Planting Seeds

To answer all these questions (based on the thesis that he was concerned for deleterious effect his killing of others would have on him) we must delve more deeply into Jacob's concern.

Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac before him, knew that he was not just an individual. Jacob and the other two forefathers knew that they were the progenitors of the Jewish people whose mission it would be to illuminate the world that would forever transform it into an utterly different and unrecognizable G-dly world. This reality would take place at some point in the future and it is what we know of as the Messianic Age.

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs, particularly Jacob, were the delicate seeds or saplings that were being planted by G-d to ensure the future changes. Every event in their lives was geared to cultivating and nurturing these seeds and saplings. If the slightest thing went wrong and their behavior was found wanting, even if it was inadvertent or even if it would taint their character ever so subtly, it could have major ramifications for the future of the Jewish people and indeed the entire world.

For one, it would require their children to go through an even more difficult future. They would need a more intense refining program to compensate for the damaged spiritual

"gene" of their patriarchal progenitor. A minor defect in the genetic material can result in a major deficit in the offspring which necessitates major intervention and repair.

In spiritual terms this would result in his progeny, the Jewish people, having a significantly diminished spiritual potential, which would undermine their well-being. This weakened spirituality could ultimately spell disaster for them due to a prolonged stay in exile.

Exile is a painful surgical process. It is intended to refine and rehabilitate us; it is fraught with its own pitfalls. Besides the inevitable pain and suffering exile has wrought, we are more vulnerable and susceptible to the forces of assimilation.

Worst of all, the ramifications of the defective spiritual gene, in the long run, could delay the onset of the Messianic Age, when G-d's plan for the world will finally be realized.

All of this may have been streaming through Jacob's mind when he considered the prospect of having to fight Esau.

Jacob's Fear of Sin

This could answer a question concerning Jacob's fear that he might be killed. The Talmud asks, wasn't he promised by G-d that He would be protected? The Talmud answers,

he was concerned that he might become so tainted by sin that he would forfeit G-d's protection.

Commentators have not been satisfied with the Talmud's answer when taken at face value. To them, it is inconceivable that G-d would go back on His unconditional and unequivocal promise to Jacob that He would be with him.

In light of the above, we may suggest that Jacob's fear was primarily for the blemish his sins might have caused so that even if he successfully weathered the Esau storm and not die in the process, he would still be diminished. That diminution would have an unpredictable ripple effect on his progeny.

Jacob's Limp

Indeed, this is precisely what happened. Jacob encounters Esau's angel in the night, who wrestles with and injures him. Where is Jacob injured? In the part of the body associated with reproduction. This tells us that Jacob's encounter with Esau did have a deleterious effect on his progeny. In the end though, Jacob was healed and that portends we will be liberated with Moshiach. However, we have had to endure the bitter and harsh Galus and as a reminder of that we do not eat the sciatic nerve of any animal.

Jacob was justified in his fear that his imperfections would prove deleterious for the future of the Jewish people. We can now see that Jacob's fear of being killed was actually a fear of being spiritually diminished, with an exponentially more severe effect on his progeny.

All Questions Answered

We may now answer all of the questions raised above and tie all the loose ends together:

The reason Jacob was so concerned about killing others is that the violence, although totally justified, could create a tiny "scratch" in his spiritual generic makeup which would have a significant impact on the future.

We can now understand how dividing his camp into two would solve the problem raised by his fear of killing others. By dividing his camp and ensuring that one half would escape it would mean that one part of his family would be blemish free; they would not have engaged in the violence. And their violence-free genetic makeup would produce spiritually healthy descendants.

Rabbi Meir and Otherness

The word "others," we have seen, is said to allude to the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Meir, who was nicknamed "Others."

The simple reason for this epithet is that he was penalized for his disrespect for the head of the Sanhedrin at that time. Instead of referring to him by his proper name—"Rabbi Meir says…"—the Talmud frequently states, "Others say."

However, as the Rebbe explains, this title was also an honorific as it alludes to Rabbi Meir's *otherness*. He was in a league by himself. So great and profound was his wisdom that none of his colleagues could fathom their depth. He was distinguished by his otherness.

Perhaps, Jacob's fear was that if he acquired some negative traits as a consequence of his need to engage in violence it would scar his spiritual genetic makeup. And as a result, the "otherness" of his progeny would be lost. His descendants would be made ordinary and incapable of bringing the otherness of Divine light (the word "Meir" means "illuminate") to their lives. They would be condemned forever to the quotidian state of Galus.

To ensure that the future of the Jewish people would be extraordinary, Jacob resisted having to engage in even the most kosher form of violence thereby guaranteeing his progeny an early entry into the illuminating otherness of Moshiach.

Double Light

On the 19th of Kislev, this coming Tuesday, we will be celebrating the liberation of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the first Rebbe of Chabad and the author of the classic work Tanya, also known as the Alter Rebbe) from Tsarist imprisonment. He saw his liberation as a Divinely sanctioned "license" to continue spreading the profound mystical teachings of Judaism contained in Chassidus.

The name Schneur means "double light" and alludes to a higher dimension of G-dly light. His teachings reveal the "otherness" of G-d, Torah and Israel and pave the way for the ultimate otherness of Moshiach and the Final Redemption.

Our generation, in particular, has been bequeathed Rabbi Meir's otherness as well as the other-worldly light of all the Chabad Rebbes, particularly our Rebbe, and their teachings of Chassidus. May we soon see the imminent unfolding of the Final Redemption and our entry into the world of otherness!

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

SELF RESPECT

We are witness to unprecedented, almost universal, opposition to our rights to the Land of Israel, coming not only from our most implacable enemies in the far-right or far-left, but even from the most "sophisticated" leaders in the academic world.

Many of those, who we felt were the most tolerant and liberal members of society that we craved to be identified with, have turned against us.

And simultaneously, some of our erstwhile enemies in the former Soviet Union, among others, have given us their blessings and assisted us in building communities, synagogues and Jewish schools.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

SELF RESPECT

Esau's Guardian Angel

In the narrative where Jacob is ready to meet his brother Esau, there is a part where Jacob sends his family ahead and he remains alone. At that point, he is met by this mysterious individual who wrestles with him all night. In the end, this attacker manages to injure Jacob, by dislocating his sciatic nerve, but was compelled by Jacob to admit defeat. This he did by changing Jacob's name from Jacob to Israel, which connotes the idea of being the master over "G-d and people."

According to our Sages, the mysterious attacker, was not a person but indeed an angel—the guardian angel of Esau. And the meaning of being a "master over G-d" is that he was victorious over angels of G-d.

While there are many enigmatic parts to this story, there is one that has serious implications for the Jewish people, particularly in our day and age.

If this attacker was a mere mortal, then we could understand why he waited for Jacob to be alone before attacking. But, now that we know that he was in reality an angel, why did he wait for Jacob to be alone? Who could stop an angel from harming Jacob?

The Power of Loneliness'

The answer to this question lies in a better understanding of what it means for a person to be alone. Loneliness is one of the most difficult situations that confront humans. We are social animals and we have a need to be together with others. This is so central to our humanity that soon after creating Adam, G-d tells him, "It is not good for man to be alone." He then creates Eve to be Adam's life companion.

But loneliness is not only difficult from an emotional vantage point; it also makes us vulnerable to all the negative forces that surround us, because the lonely individual craves companionship, and may not discriminate between the positive and the negative ones.

Many classical commentators have described the loneliness of our forefather Jacob and his vulnerability and ultimate victory as a paradigm for the future of the Jewish people.

We have always been alone. Our Sages describe our relationship with the other nations of the world as "one sheep among seventy wolves."

And it is this loneliness that has caused so many of our people to look for acceptance by other nations. This craving for acceptance and companionship takes many forms. In its mildest form, we look to emulate the culture of others, failing to discover and appreciate our own.

In the most extreme form, many Jews have been known to identify with their enemies and their desire to vilify and even destroy us. Unfortunately, both forms—and everything in between—have become common especially in recent years.

In the end, two things will happen:

The Danger of Acceptance

First the people who we try to appease will turn against those who have sought their companionship and acceptance.

One glaring example of this was the way Stalin murdered all of the Jewish communists who were the most loyal members of his party, and fought ruthlessly against Jews and Judaism. Yet, Stalin killed them precisely because they were Jews. It made no difference that they had tried so

hard to be part of the system; the system never recognized them as anything but the lonely, despised Jew.

The second thing that will happen, paradoxically, is that the nations that stood against us will ultimately concede that we are Israel, to be respected and emulated. The sooner we begin to have self-respect and recognize that we are part of a continuum of thousands of years of bringing G-d's light to the world, the sooner the nations of the world will assist us in our mission.

Indeed, we can now see both responses of the nations of the world towards the Jewish people materializing before our eyes.

The Paradoxical Phenomenon

On the one hand, we are witness to unprecedented, almost universal, opposition to our rights to the Land of Israel, coming not only from our most implacable enemies in the far-right or far-left, but even from the most "sophisticated" leaders in the academic world. Many of those, who we felt were the most tolerant and liberal members of society that we craved to be identified with, have turned against us.

And simultaneously, some of our erstwhile enemies in the former Soviet Union, among others, have given us their

blessings and assisted us in building communities, synagogues and Jewish schools.

This paradoxical phenomenon is a sign of the times we are in. As discussed in previous messages, we are now living on the threshold of the Messianic Redemption. So we are straddling the fence, as it were, between Galut-exile and Geulah-Redemption, and we therefore experience characteristics of both.

The way we can push ourselves over the top of the fence into the exclusive arena of the Messianic Age, is to not lose our self-respect by realizing that we are indeed a nation that stands alone, in a positive sense, because we were given a G-d given mission to be a light unto the nations. This we do primarily by living unabashedly as Jews steeped in Judaism, and spreading more goodness and kindness to all.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

WRESTLING

There are times in our lives that we stand alone; we feel isolated and lonely.

This is not all bad.

When we do not have others to look at and interact with, we become introspective.

We begin to think more seriously about who we are and what is our purpose in life. These periods of introspection can actually help us reorient our lives and turn a new leaf.

Judaism, despite its focus on the community has designated special times for soul-searching such as the reading of the Shema before retiring to bed, and birthdays.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

WRESTLING

Left Alone

Of all of Jacob's trials, the one that stands out as being the strangest was when he was left alone and had to wrestle with an angel. This wrestling match lasted all night until the angel struck Jacob's thigh and injured him. But, in spite of his injury, Jacob ultimately prevailed over the angel, and he was compelled to bless him that his name shall no longer be Jacob (that implied being a heel) but the more dignified name of Israel (which signifies leadership).

Our Sages tell us that "all of the events that transpired with the Patriarchs are "signs" for the children." This means that the challenges that our Patriarchs had and met provide us with direction and spiritual assistance in meeting similar challenges in our own lives.

When the Torah speaks of the challenge of this life and death wrestling match, it prefaces this narrative with the fact that Jacob was left alone. It follows that Jacob's

vulnerability was due to his being alone.

The immediate lesson we can learn from this is the need for us to find companionship. Indeed, our Sages in Ethics of the Fathers stress the need to "acquire a friend," in whom we can confide.

Not Always a Bad Idea

Moreover, this story of how Jacob was left alone and wrestled all night with this sinister angel—who ultimately injured him and then blessed him—can be applied to each and every one of us as individuals, as well as to the Jewish people as a whole.

On the national level, the Jewish people—despite their efforts to be part of the national and international community—frequently sense that they are all alone, isolated and alienated from the entire world.

This standing alone is not all bad. Throughout history, we stood alone in the moral and spiritual sense. We did not stoop to the low levels that the majority of other nations degenerated. And while we were downtrodden, we had every right to hold our heads high, with pride for the way we behaved in the face of adversity. We did not lose our faith. We did not lose our morality and ethics. We produced the greatest minds and hearts, even as the world

looked down and sneered at us.

But, the world did not just isolate us. It also "ganged up" on us and tried to place the blame of so many of the world's ills on us. Tragically, this phenomenon is still very much the rule in international circles. Israel is the pariah nation. These are very painful times, especially when many of those who we thought were our friends have abandoned us.

The story with Jacob is told every year for us to realize that this isolation has a happy ending. As painful as this encounter was for Jacob and as severe his injury, he elicits his adversary's admission that he is not just a Jacob, a heel, but Israel, a leader. We too, are therefore confident that we will ultimately prevail, and even our detractors will be compelled to concede our singular role as Israel, a "light to the nations."

Introspective

The story of Jacob can also be said to apply to each and every one of us as individuals. There are times in our lives that we stand alone; we feel isolated and lonely.

In a certain limited sense, this is not all bad. At times like these, when we do not have others to look at and interact with, we spend time with ourselves; we become

introspective. We begin to think more seriously about who we are and what is our purpose in life. These periods of introspection can actually help us reorient our lives and turn a new leaf.

Indeed, Judaism, despite its focus on the community and the strong need for social interaction, has designated special times for soul-searching. The reading of the Shema before retiring to bed—particularly at the end of the week, or month—is an appropriate time to reflect on one's past day, week or month. Certainly before the end of the year, one looks for occasions to be alone, to afford oneself the opportunity to focus inward.

Birthdays, in Chassidic tradition, are also times for introspection; absorbed in our thoughts about how the past year has gone, and what can be done to make the next year better.

Overcoming the Pain

However, being alone can also be a very painful and vulnerable time. Without the support system we enjoy from our family and friends, the time we have with ourselves can turn into loneliness and can lead to depression. It can become a wrestling match between us and the "demons" that seek to destroy us.

Jacob's victory over his wrestling partner enables us—even in times of isolation—to overpower our internal adversary, and to transform our lives from being a mere Jacob into a sublime and dignified Israel. To go from a lonely and forlorn individual to a member of a vibrant community..

And just as on the national level, Jacob's victory portended the time when Israel shall emerge from exile and the negative aspects of isolation, with the coming of Moshiach, so too, will Moshiach take each and every one of us, **as individuals,** out of the state and feeling of loneliness into a state of liberation and joy.

ESSAY NINETEEN

TRUST IN TRUST

There is a famous adage stated by the third Chabad Rebbe; known as the Tzemach Tzedek that echoes this idea: "Think positive and it will be positive."

ESSAY NINETEEN

TRUST IN TRUST

Why was Jacob Afraid?

Jacob is now returning to the Land of Israel plagued with uncertainty as to how his brother will receive him. When Jacob hears the report of the scouts he sent to determine Esau's intentions—that he was coming to "greet" him with 400 of his henchmen—Jacob, the Torah states, was exceedingly frightened.

Anticipating the obvious question as to why Jacob was apprehensive, inasmuch as he had been promised by G-d that He would protect him, the Torah records Jacob's thoughts on this matter:

> "I have become diminished due to all the acts of kindness and truth that You have done for Your servant, for when I crossed the Jordan I had but one stick, and now I have amassed two camps."

The simple understanding of this text is as Rashi explains that Jacob feared that he had exhausted his merits. He feared that they have become diminished because of all G-d's kindness to him, and the way all of His promises were truly fulfilled. Perhaps, Jacob thought, his sins might now stand in the way of G-d's promise to him that he would be protected. And to illustrate the magnitude of G-d's kindness to him, Jacob pointed out how he had crossed the Jordan possessing only a stick, and now he had so prospered that he was able to divide his vast possessions into two camps.

Didn't G-d Promise Him Protection

The question has been raised, why Jacob should think that he exhausted his merits. Had G-d not **promised** to protect him it might have made some sense as to why he was not secure that his good deeds alone would guarantee him Divine protection. Jacob, in his humility, might have thought that he was not so deserving; and that he had already received ample pay for his good deeds. But once G-d **promised** that He would protect him, wouldn't that negate the possibility that his sins would cause him to be delivered into the hands of Esau?

Another question: Why did Jacob mention the fact that he had crossed the Jordan with a stick? If he wanted to

emphasize his impoverished state at that time and contrast it with his current state of affluence, he could have merely stated that he had prospered greatly since G-d made that promise to him. Why the emphasis on the stick he used to cross the Jordan?

Rashi seems to be addressing this question as well when he cites the Midrashic comment that he crossed the Jordan river by applying his stick to it and it split (much like the splitting of the Red Sea by Moses centuries later). According to this interpretation, he was not trying to dramatize his poverty. On the contrary, he was trying to dramatize how good G-d was to him in the past.

However, the following question can be raised on Rashi's commentary:

From the Biblical text it seems that Jacob was juxtaposing the two: He crossed the Jordan with a stick and now he had two camps. If the mention of the crossing of the Jordan with his stick is to highlight the great miracle of the splitting the Jordan with that stick, how does that contrast with the fact that he now had two camps?

One final question:

To illustrate his current prosperous economic state, why did he mention that he had **two** camps? The only reason he had divided his entourage into two camps, the Torah explicitly stated above, was to ensure that if Esau strikes

the first camp, the second could escape. It does not necessarily indicate the magnitude of his wealth. Instead, he should have described the enormity of his assets; the huge volume of cattle and servants he owned, etc—a small portion of which he paraded before and gave to Esau to impress him.

Fearful of His Lack of Trust

One answer can be provided that will address all of the questions:

Jacob was indeed promised by G-d that he would protect him. And a promise is not abrogated merely because of a sin. But Jacob feared that G-d's promise might be compromised not simply by his sins, but by virtue of—what he thought was—his diminished level of trust in that very promise.

In other words, if G-d promises us something, it may be suggested, the only prerequisite to the fulfillment of that promise is that we believe it unequivocally. If one wants to rely on a promise but exhibits a lack of faith in the very efficacy of that promise, the promise may not materialize.

Buy that Lottery Ticket if...

There is a story told of a man in Russia who heard a stirring sermon from a great rabbi about the power of trust in G-d. He then purchased a lottery ticket sure that he would win the $100,000 jackpot.

When he told the rabbi who delivered that sermon how it inspired him to buy the ticket and that he was sure he would win the $100,000, the rabbi offered to purchase the ticket from him for $10,000. The man jumped at the opportunity to make a sure profit and said yes to the offer, upon which the rabbi said, "your ticket is worthless. By agreeing to sell it so quickly for a tenth of its value, it demonstrated that you did not really trust that you would win, hence the ticket was not worth very much..."

This then is what Jacob was fearful of. When G-d made the promise to him, he had full faith in its fulfillment. He was ready to cross the Jordan by just applying his stick to it; and it split! Jacob attributed that to his absolute faith in G-d's word to him.

But, now, Jacob bemoaned, "I have divided my camp into two sections. I have lost some of that certainty that I would come out unscathed. I sense that I have become diminished in terms of my trust, and therefore I am no longer a worthy recipient of that promise."

Think Ppsitive!

The fact that, in the end, Jacob emerged from his confrontation with Esau unscathed proved that Jacob was only partially right. It is true that one receives G-d's protection as a result of having complete faith and trust in G-d. That trust itself is what makes good things happen because it places the person in G-d's "hands."

There is a famous adage stated by the third Chabad Rebbe; known as the Tzemach Tzedek that echoes this idea: "Think positive and it will be positive."

There is, however, one salient difference between Jacob's case and the typical situation of trusting in G-d. In Jacob's situation, he had received G-d's explicit promise that he would be protected. His imagined lack of trust would not invalidate G-d's express guarantee to him.

Once, G-d communicates His intentions to do good to us through His prophets—or as in Jacob's case, to Jacob directly—He will not go back on His word, even if we subsequently lack in our own connection to G-d.

Not Internally Strong

On a deeper level it may be suggested that Jacob was indeed aware of this as well—that G-d's promise will happen regardless of his level of trust. He was distraught

over the possibility that it will happen only because G-d promised it and was therefore "bound" by His promise, but, he Jacob was not really worthy of that kindness. And when Jacob expressed his fear of Esau he was fearful not of Esau destroying him physically, but that because he was spiritually ill prepared for this confrontation, he—and primarily his family—would not be internally strong enough to resist Esau's influence. Because when one trust is strong it rubs off on others and strengthens them.

Two Scenarios for the Imminent Arrival of Moshiach

There is a direct lesson to be derived from the above analysis for our generation:

The Rebbe has stated—and, indeed, stated that it was a prophecy—that the coming of Moshiach and the complete Redemption is imminent. Whether or not our trust in this promise is complete, whether or not we are worthy of it, it will happen!

There are, however, two possible scenarios for it to happen. It can come despite our lack of trust in G-d's promise or it can come as a result of our trust in that promise.

The difference between these two approaches is that in the latter, preferred, scenario, we will be prepared for the Redemption and rejoice every moment we await its

unfolding. Furthermore, this trust in the prophecy concerning the imminent Redemption will encourage us to live our lives in total harmony with the Torah's teachings as to the ideal life we will lead in the Messianic Era. It will also serve to influence and insulate our children and those around us so that they too will be impervious to the Esau/exile influences and greet Moshiach with boundless joy.

ESSAY TWENTY

PREPARATIONS FOR MOSHIACH

We cannot allow the temptations and compromises of Galus to gain mastery over us. This is a continuing struggle and we cannot go into it with our eyes closed.

But, even as we prepare to do battle with the forces of Galus, we must base that preparedness on the confidence that we will be victorious.

While we prepare to fight the unredeemable aspects of exile we must develop a positive and uplifting mindset, which sees the Redemption not as repudiation of exile but rather the liberation of its positive elements.

ESSAY TWENTY

PREPARATIONS FOR MOSHIACH

The Three Preparations of Our Patriarch

The confrontation between Jacob and Esau—one of the most poignant confrontations recorded in the Torah - portended all of history's conflicts between the Jews and other nations. Jacob was unsure what his brother's reaction to him might be. Would Esau forgive him for appropriating their father's blessings, or would he continue to carry a grudge and try to kill him, as was his original intention?

Gripped with this uncertainty, what did Jacob do?

Rashi, based on a cursory survey of the text, informs us that "Jacob prepared himself for three things: a gift, prayer and war." Rashi cites the verse (32:22): "the gift passed on ahead of him" as proof that Jacob sent Esau a gift. He then cites an earlier verse (32:10): "O G-d of my father Abraham..." which contains Jacob's prayer and a still earlier verse (32:9): "...so the remaining camp will survive," to indicate his preparedness for battle.

The Order of Things

A question has been raised: why does Rashi cite these three preparations in reverse? First he mentions the gift, then prayer and then war, when the Torah mentions them in the opposite order?

One explanation for this discrepancy, given by a contemporary work (Avir Yosef), is that the Torah presents these three preparations in the order that they occurred to Jacob: First he prepared himself for battle by dividing his camp into two sections, then he entreated G-d in prayer. His final step was to send an elaborate gift to his brother.

Rashi, by contrast, presents these three efforts in the order of their execution. First, Jacob would attempt to assuage Esau's anger by sending him an elaborate gift. If Esau would not accept the gift and continued to approach Jacob's camp, he would pray to G-d that Esau would not attack. If that didn't work he was then prepared to wage war.

This does not answer the question of why these steps did not occur to Jacob in the order that he would execute them, i.e., gift first, prayer next and then preparation for battle?

Another point: One might have imagined that Jacob would pray first, before taking the other two courses of action. Why then did he consider fighting before prayer?

Jacob's three modes of preparation can guide us in our own lives. On the most basic level, they instruct us how to deal with a putative enemy. We must be prepared to mollify him by a gesture such as a gift, but always remember that our lives depend on G-d. As a last resort, we must be prepared to defend ourselves.

But, the Torah is relevant to all situations and must convey a spiritual message to us even when we are not physically confronting a mortal enemy. What spiritual message is contained in Jacob's three modes of preparation and the order in which they were conceived and executed?

Confronting the Man of the Field

Torah describes Esau as "a man of the field." He was the perennial outsider. When a Jew must leave a secure and holy environment and relate to "outsider" people and worldly situations, he must prepare himself for three things:

At the outset, he must not view the outside world as an adversary, even if it is. To approach the outside world with a negative mindset is unhealthy and counterproductive. We must approach the outside world with confidence and trust in G-d that, with the proper attitude, we will be able to change the world and bring the outsiders inside. Towards

this end, the first step in our confrontation with the people of the field is to send them a "gift."

Although a gift, by definition, is unsolicited, the Talmud (See Megillah 26b) nevertheless states: "If he had not done something pleasing to the giver, he would not have given him a gift." In other words, a gift is an expression that we can see and recognize the positive in the recipient; that the recipient has something to offer and has offered it in the past. By recognizing the good in the "other who is situated outside in the field," it helps actualize whatever positive qualities may lie dormant within him.

After one expresses confidence in the other, one must resort to prayer. The reason it follows "sending of the gift" is that prayer has a particular limitation. It cannot change a person who has free will because G-d does not interfere with our free choice. It is only after we soften the person's mindset and awaken his hidden goodness that we can pray to assist that individual to maximize his potential. Prayer can help remove the obstacles to this actualizing process.

Moreover, prayer, although it is not a confrontational exercise, demonstrates that we are not entirely confident with the outcome; we perceive the "outside" as a moral threat. Prayer is usually reserved for situations in which we see ourselves as helpless. That is not how we must begin. Our first step must be to psyche ourselves into having a

totally positive and optimistic demeanor even before we pray.

After we develop a positive attitude about our prospects for success, we must prepare ourselves to combat the outside's insidious influences. While we remain optimistic, we should also be realistic about the negative forces in the world.

One develops the correct mindset by focusing first on the positive. That is precisely what Jacob did. Even before he set into motion his three pronged approach, he conditioned his thoughts to have a positive outlook on his meeting with Esau. Once he acquired the appropriate mindset he could then focus on the practical necessities of praying and preparing for battle.

The same is true with our own dealings with "the man of the field." Once we develop the proper positive approach by sending "gifts," we can proceed to the execution phase of our relationship with the outside. We can't take any chances with the hostile influences of the outside world and we must be equipped with the necessary resources to fight the negative forces.

Galus Edom

Our Sages classify the exile which began with the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans as Galus Edom. In other words, it is the exile associated with Esau and his physical and spiritual heirs.

While Esau has been our mortal enemy for close to two millennia, the Messianic Age will bring about a full rapprochement with him. All nations will unite in their devotion to one G-d and live in peace with the people of Israel. They will support our claim to the Land of Israel and our construction of the Third Bais Hamikdash on the Temple Mount without reservation.

However, as long as we are still in exile, albeit on the very threshold of Redemption, we must prepare ourselves for that period during which all the evil of the world will be transformed into holiness.

And just as Jacob did before his reunion with Esau, we must develop two different systems in these last days of exile, which differ in terms of the proper order of our efforts to confront the Esau forces of Galus: a practical approach towards Galus and a theoretical approach to guide us in how we are to think about Galus.

Liberation, Not Repudiation

In the practical world, we have to remain vigilant and ready to combat the threats to our Jewishness. We cannot allow the temptations and compromises of Galus to gain mastery over us. This is a continuing struggle and we cannot go into it with our eyes closed. But, even as we prepare to do battle with the forces of Galus, we must base that preparedness on the confidence that we will be victorious. Our confidence is rooted in our understanding that, at its source, Galus paradoxically possesses an extremely lofty spiritual energy. Galus has challenged us deeply and elicited the most potent forces from us. Our recognition of that positive dimension is our gift to Galus. And while we prepare to fight the unredeemable aspects of exile we must develop a positive and uplifting mindset, which sees the Redemption not as repudiation of exile but rather the liberation of its positive elements.

G-d Regrets Galus

The process described above helps us reconcile the contradictory statements we find concerning Galus. In some sources (Talmud, Sukkah 52b) we find that G-d regrets having created Galus, whereas in other sources (See *Sefer HaSichos* 5751 p. 494) we are taught that Galus possesses tremendous spiritual energy. Galus is likened to a

dream which combines opposites, suggesting that it possesses a powerful aspect of holiness that can combine opposites (See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol 15 p. 346).

What does it mean when the Talmud says that G-d regrets Galus? G-d obviously wouldn't have created it if He thought it wasn't going to be good or useful. G-d, obviously, never does anything He would regret. One answer is that G-d wants us to emulate Him by adopting a sense of utter revulsion for Galus and pray incessantly for it to end. The last thing we should do is to feel comfortable with Galus.

On the other hand, the negative attitude towards Galus itself that we must adopt for practical purposes does not mean we should adopt a negative mentality in our last moments of Galus. We have to acknowledge the latent good in Galus that we will soon set free. We must rejoice that we will be leaving all the negative aspects of Galus behind, imminently, with the coming of Moshiach! Even as we are ready to battle the inherently evil aspects of Galus, we experience an unshakeable trust in G-d, confidence in His mercy and a transcendent, joyous optimism.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

DON'T LOSE YOUR STAFF

When we start to strengthen our trust, the forces of evil and negativity look for our vulnerable spaces hoping to drag us down even more.

They find that vulnerability in loneliness. Esau's guardian angel waited for Jacob to be alone and at that moment he attacked him.

As soon as we remove ourselves from the community and undermine its unity we become vulnerable; our faith and trust will suffer accordingly.

Our unity endows us with the power to remain impervious to the threat from Esau..

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

DON'T LOSE YOUR STAFF

Jacob's New Challenge

Jacob has been away from home for 20 years, living and contending with his uncle Laban. Jacob has had a very challenging life and now realizes that he will have to contend with yet another, perhaps even more formidable challenge: his brother Esau.

When Jacob heard from his scouts that Esau was aware of his return and was coming to confront him with 400 heavily armed men, Jacob became apprehensive. As a precaution he divided his entourage into two camps, after which he turned to G-d in prayer.

In his prayer he says to G-d,

> "I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps."

Why did Jacob have to mention that he crossed the Jordan with his staff? And what is the connection between crossing the Jordan with a staff to the division of his family into two camps?

The Chassidic work *Arugas Habosem* explains that Jacob was contrasting his faith and the trust he displayed when he first left his father's house with the feelings of trust he had now. Rashi, citing a Midrash, states that when Jacob left his father's house he split the Jordan River with his staff. Jacob therefore mentions this fact as a sign of his earlier display of trust in G-d. And now, laments Jacob, "I have been compelled to divide my camp into two, out of fear of Esau." He took this defensive course of action because, in Jacob's heart, his trust in G-d, his *bitachon,* now was not as strong as it was when he left home. Somehow, the prospect of the confrontation with Esau had a deleterious effect on his spiritual standing.

Distressed of Fear

This may also explain why, immediately before he speaks of his crossing the Jordan with his staff, he says, "I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant." Jacob felt this feeling of diminution partly because he realized how he had changed; his trust in G-d and the power it generated to split the

Jordan, had waned, compelling him to take more conventional methods of defending himself.

This approach may also explains why Jacob stated that he "became very frightened and it distressed him." Rashi notes the redundancy here. In light of the above it may be suggested that his fear was the confrontation with Esau, but his distress was caused by his diminution, having fallen to a lower level of trust. In other words, he was distressed that he was fearful.

Trust, the Staff of Life and Redemption

Jacob's staff was the symbol of his original powerful trust in G-d and it provides us all a lesson for all of us on the power of trust. With trust we can even split rivers. No obstacle is too formidable for us when we have trust in G-d.

The power of trust in G-d is actually hinted in the Hebrew word for staff, *makel. Makel* is an acronym for the words of our daily liturgy at the end of the Amidah prayer: "***Mai****'olam'* ***ke****vinu* ***l****ach*, we have always trusted in You."

The staff that Jacob used to express his trust in G-d is a ubiquitous instrument, one with which great miracles were performed throughout history.

Indeed, the Midrash comments on the verse in the Book of Psalms (Psalm 110): "G-d will stretch forth your mighty staff from Zion to rule amid your enemies" and states:

> Which staff is this? It was the staff of Jacob, who said, 'for with my staff I crossed this Jordan." It was the staff in Judah's hand, 'the staff in your hand (Genesis 38:18); and the staff in Moses' hand, 'the staff of G-d in his hand,' (Exodus 17:9). It was the staff in Aaron's hand, 'Aaron cast his staff from his hand' (ibid 7:10) and the staff in the hand of every single king, until it was hidden when the Holy Temple was destroyed. And in the future it will be handed to King Moshiach, and with it he will in the future rule over the idol worshippers.

From this Midrash we derive that the power to break through obstacles, which was hidden in the time of exile, will reemerge with Moshiach.

This Midrash also suggests that the power Moshiach has to remove idolatry, the root and symbol of all evil, is through his staff, i.e., the trust he has in G-d.

In light of the Rebbe's teachings that Moshiach accomplishes his purpose by us accepting Moshiach and internalizing his presence and ideals, it follows that our trust that G-d will take us out of exile is an integral part of the process of making the final redemption a reality.

Removing the Obstacles

However there are always obstacles placed in our way. There are always influences that dampen our faith and trust, and we need to know what they are and how to counter them.

The first step is to recognize that it is our lack of trust that is the problem and not the obstacles that stand in our way. The only real obstacle is the fear that we are unable to surmount these perceived difficulties. When Jacob lamented to G-d that he was compelled to divide his camp into two, according to *Arugas Habosem*, it was Jacob's way of acknowledging that he was not happy with his diminished state and wanted to go back to the day his staff (read: his *bitachon)* was strong enough to break through any barrier.

Our Patriarch Jacob has paved the way for us to recognize that while we may have lost some of that trust, we can and must beseech G-d to restore it.

This message is especially relevant today. It has been over two decades since the Rebbe told us that the "Time of your Redemption has arrived" and that "the actual Redemption was imminent" and "is right in front of us and all we have to do is open our eyes to that reality." It is not too difficult to see how one's trust can become eroded after such a long time since the Rebbe made those powerful declarations.

Let us not forget that the power to bring an end to the exile and eliminate all the idolatries of our time is through the staff of Moshiach, the power of trust. It is therefore quite understandable that Satan, i.e., the forces of negativity, will do everything possible to dampen our faith and trust.

The Wrestling Match and the Implication of Jacob's Injury

If Jacob's realization that his fallen state of trust was an issue, matters became even more ominous when he was left alone at night and had to wrestle with Esau's guardian angel.

The lesson from this confrontation is that when we start to strengthen our trust, the forces of evil and negativity look for our vulnerable spaces hoping to drag us down even more. They find that vulnerability in loneliness. Esau's guardian angel waited for Jacob to be alone and at that moment he attacked him.

The lesson we must learn is that our unity endows us with the power to remain impervious to the threat from Esau. As soon as we remove ourselves from the community and undermine its unity we become vulnerable; our faith and trust will suffer accordingly.

Another lesson we can learn from the confrontation Jacob had with the angel is that it left him injured. The angel struck him in the thigh, causing Jacob to limp.

Thighs or loins are metaphors for one's children. The angel saw that Jacob was strong enough to resist his assault on trust, so he hoped to "at least" weaken his children and descendants, particularly the last generation of exile situated on the threshold of Redemption. The forces of evil know that with the Redemption they will be out of business. The entire world will acknowledge G-d's presence and all evil will be eliminated. The Satan, Esau's guardian angel, was upset with his loss to Jacob, thereby enabling the fulfillment of the blessings Jacob had wrested from Esau. The Satan consoled himself by injuring Jacob's progeny. Perhaps, the angel hoped, he could delay the onset of the Redemption and prolong his tenure as the world's foremost troublemaker.

Unfortunately, the angel has partially succeeded in his quest. As we have seen, the complete Redemption has been postponed many times throughout our history. But nowhere is Esau's angel more obsessed with delaying the inevitable than in our own generation.

The obvious lesson we must learn from the above is twofold:

First, we must never lose Jacob's/Judah's/ Moses'/Aaron's/David's/Moshiach's staff. At the very least, if we do lose some trust, we must implore G-d to strengthen it again.

Second, we must not allow ourselves to become vulnerable to a wrestling match with the forces of negativity by being alone. We must not isolate ourselves from our families, communities, mentors and our Rebbe.

To be sure, in the end Esau's angel had to concede defeat and bless Jacob that his name shall be Israel, which connotes our mastery over all the forces, including and particularly the forces of exile. And in the end, the Torah confirms this when the sun shines and heals Jacob. Subsequently the Torah states that Jacob returned to the city of Shechem "whole." Not a trace of the past negativity remained, nor will it remain in us at the end.

The challenge for us in these crucial moments of history, standing on the very threshold of Redemption, or as the Rebbe put it, "the Redemption is right in front of our eyes," is to open our eyes to see the new reality. But, at all times we must carry Jacob's staff in our hands, which will help us cross the Jordan for the last time and reenter the Land of Israel, with Moshiach at our head!